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HABERMAS AND ADORNO
ON DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT

A Dissertation Presented

by

ALEX PIENKNAGURA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 1991

Department of Philosophy

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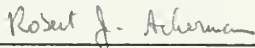
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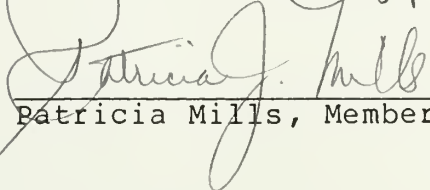
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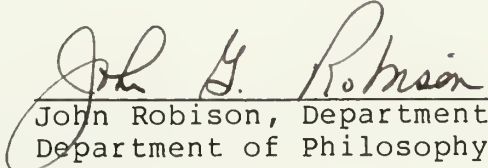
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At the most delicate moment in my philosophical journey, at its inception, Rodolfo Kaufler, Luis Campos Martínez, and Paul Engel supported me in my struggle to begin to think autonomously.

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My parents have always stood by me. I should like to think that they will accept this work as an expression of my gratitude for what I learned at home.

ABSTRACT

HABERMAS AND ADORNO
ON DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT

MAY 1991

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In my dissertation, I argue that Juergen Habermas misinterprets Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment. Habermas claims that Adorno and Horkheimer universalize instrumental reason, and that they hence undermine their own discursive-rational contribution. He thinks critical social theory can only be reflexively grounded if it recognizes as its pragmatic truth-condition a counterfactually conceived communicative procedure that would be free of distortion. In my view, Habermas differentiates the dialectic of enlightenment. Adorno and Horkheimer do not reduce thought to instrumental reason, and they characterize enlightenment as a historically differentiated process. They maintain that enlightenment comprises both instrumental and critical thought, critical thought being understood by them as determinate negation. I interpret Dialectic of Enlightenment as a theory of the formation of the subject. Furthermore, I contend that Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory eschew Habermas's mistaken reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment. They develop the latter's dialectical account of

subjectivization. Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory advance against the backdrop of Dialectic of Enlightenment's theory of the progressive instrumentalization of the self the idea of an unregimented subjective knowledge and experience of nature.

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INTRODUCTION

In his 1937 essay Traditional and Critical Theory,¹ Max Horkheimer contrasts the elasticity of critical social theory with what he sees as a contemplative, passive, and uncritical traditional theory. Critical social theory, according to Horkheimer, stresses the historicity of its object of investigation, that is, of advanced industrial society. Moreover, he suggests, such a theory treats of its object, not as a harmonious organic whole, but as fractured by conflicting economic, political, cultural, affective and cognitive interests. Horkheimer further argues that critical social theory does not understand itself as if it were independent of material processes, but that it thematizes instead its own emplacement within the social division of labor. For Horkheimer, critical social theory does not pretend to remain neutral with respect to the antagonisms besetting the contemporary world. Indeed, he claims, the theory criticizes bourgeois society for failing to live up to its own ideals of justice, liberty and equality. Horkheimer avers that critical theory aims to disclose the processes leading to the stultification of consciousness, to the erasure of subjective autonomy, under Fascism and Stalinism. Critical social theory does not claim to contemplate immutable, ahistorical forms, nor does it posit a monadic cognizing subject that supposedly legislates truth and meaning. The theory understands itself as dialectical: it highlights the dynamic and conflictual character of its

object; and it thematizes its difference, its critical distance from its material conditions of possibility, that is, from the social division of labor.

Juergen Habermas argues that Dialectic of Enlightenment, which Horkheimer coauthored with Theodor Adorno in the mid-1940s, differs radically from the critical theory of the 1930s.² In effect, Habermas charges Dialectic of Enlightenment with a self-misunderstanding, with being undialectical. He claims that Dialectic of Enlightenment characterizes enlightenment reason reductively, that it monistically depicts enlightenment as instrumental rationality.³ (Reason is instrumental if it serves merely as a tool to determine what the most efficient means are to achieve whichever ends. From the standpoint of instrumental reason, the desirability and intrinsic value of social formations, works of art, happiness, in short, of human ends, are incapable of rational adjudication.) In contrast to the interdisciplinary and historically differentiated work of the 1930s, Dialectic of Enlightenment straightjackets its object in philosophico-historical fashion, Habermas asserts. That is to say, Habermas thinks that Adorno and Horkheimer construe the process of civilization teleologically as if it were unambiguously headed toward a state of total instrumentalization. For Habermas, Dialectic of Enlightenment's undifferentiated understanding of enlightenment rationality blocks theoretical access to what is in his view the paradoxical

rationalization of modernity. Habermas maintains that the modern epoch, which he aseptically defines as beginning in 1500, distinguishes itself from previous epochs, governed as they were by mythical, religious and metaphysical worldviews. The process of modernization, according to Habermas, is a process of rationalization, 'rationalization' being understood by him as a paradoxical phenomenon.⁴ On the one hand, he views the process of modernization as a process of social evolution toward communicative rationality, that is, toward a communicative procedure that would permit the noncoercive, consensual resolution of theoretical, moral and aesthetic problems. On the other hand, the very communicative processes that inspire Habermas's evolutionary optimism give rise--or so he claims--to non-linguistic media for the coordination of social action, that is, to money and power. Habermas argues that such media recoil upon their communicative conditions of possibility, and that they hence threaten to replace communicative action (which he defines as action oriented toward the attainment of intersubjective agreement) with the operations of a functional rationality. Dialectic of Enlightenment, on Habermas's interpretation, misses the potential inherent in modernity for communication free of domination. Habermas seems to hold that Dialectic of Enlightenment treats of Fascism, Stalinism, the culture and entertainment industry, and positivist science and technology, as evidence of the unambiguous triumph of

instrumental reason. As against Traditional and Critical Theory, Dialectic of Enlightenment no longer attributes to bourgeois society the capacity for realizing its ideals of justice, freedom and equality, Habermas contends. He maintains that in conceiving of instrumental rationality in totalizing fashion Horkheimer and Adorno lose sight of the fact that the philosophical theses they advance are a manifestation of noninstrumental thought, and that such theses have as their condition of possibility modernity's progress toward communicative rationality. On Habermas's reading, Dialectic of Enlightenment is not dialectical after all: it elides the contradictory nature of rationalization; and in its undifferentiated philosophico-historical pessimism, it loses touch with its historical matrix, with modernity.

My dissertation advances the view that Habermas misreads Dialectic of Enlightenment. I interpret Dialectic of Enlightenment as unfolding a theory of the formation of subjectivity. Horkheimer and Adorno do not ascribe logocentric autonomy to the subject, but understand it as molded by human interaction with external nature, the dynamic of drives, the development of the forces of production and the history of thought. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, the process of the formation of subjectivity is a process of progressive instrumentalization. Yet, pace Habermas, Adorno and

Horkheimer do not reduce subjective reason to instrumental reason. Against the backdrop of the theory of the instrumentalization of subjectivity, Dialectic of Enlightenment spawns the concept of a noninstrumental, unregimented subjective knowledge and experience of nature. In my view, Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory, unlike Habermas's critique, capture Dialectic of Enlightenment's differentiated account of the process of the formation of subjectivity.

In the first chapter, I stress the elasticity of Adorno and Horkheimer's understanding of enlightenment. Though they view enlightenment as always presupposing the separation between subject and object, their discussion remains sensitive to the historical transformations that the relation between subject and object undergoes. And the kernel of an idea developed in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory can already be found in Dialectic of Enlightenment: the autonomous art of the bourgeois era is interpreted there as the terrain, so to speak, wherein a noninstrumental subjectivity is evoked.⁵ For Adorno and Horkheimer art is cognitively significant; that is, it cannot be abstracted from the process of enlightenment. In Dialectic of Enlightenment they present in condensed form an idea that Adorno elaborates in Aesthetic Theory: insofar as art relates to nature in noninstrumental fashion, it offers knowledge of a possible subjective interaction with the

material world, which subjective interaction would be subversive of instrumental rationality.

In the second chapter, I argue that Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment does not systematically adhere to what I think are some of the main tenets of his theory of communicative action. This theory claims to be centered on a systematizing idea, namely the idea of communicative rationality.⁶ Needless to say, I do not mean to suggest that Habermas's critique of Adorno and Horkheimer is therefore false. My aim is to take his critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment as a springboard for an inquiry into the relation between his idea of distortion-free communication and modernity. Habermas assumes that, in contrast to Dialectic of Enlightenment, his philosophy furthers the advance of communicative rationality. I contend that he fails to establish a necessary connection between modernity (and hence, between his texts, which claim to capture the essence of modernity), on the one hand, and the concept of ideal speech, on the other hand. Habermas counterfactually pictures a rational communicative praxis,⁷ which he characterizes minimalistically in proceduralist terms, and he thinks his counterfactual assumption sufficiently stable to warrant substantive claims about the rationality of Dialectic of Enlightenment. Since what he counterfactually imagines is a communicative procedure that would include all possible rational users of language, I find it odd that from the standpoint of his historically localized theory he

issues statements about the rationality of Dialectic of Enlightenment that sound as if they reflected a universal consensus.

In the third chapter, I argue that Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory develop the notion of an unregimented subjective knowledge and experience of nature, which notion is introduced in Dialectic of Enlightenment. I maintain that this notion must be understood against the backdrop of Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of the formation of an instrumental subjectivity. Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory avoid what I think is Habermas's error of interpreting Dialectic of Enlightenment as if it remained fixated on instrumental rationality.

In the fourth chapter, I argue that Habermas incorrectly assumes that his concept of reflexive grounding and his claim to having transcended subject-centered thought are sufficiently stable to support his view, which is meant to be critical, that Adorno's philosophy cannot be recursively grounded and remains entangled within the paradigm of subject-centered reason. I conclude the chapter and the dissertation by arguing that Habermas falsely isolates Dialectic of Enlightenment from Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory. Adorno's philosophy is committed throughout to the view that enlightenment rationality is not only implicated in the domination of nature, but that it also opens up the space for the subject's reflection upon the subjective conditions of possibility of such domination.

According to Adorno, the potential immanent in the enlightenment tradition for a noncompulsive, unregimented human experience has not, in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, been wholly extinguished.

The question of the relation among Dialectic of Enlightenment, Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory has occupied a number of contemporary German philosophers. Ruediger Bubner thinks that there is no connection between Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory.⁸ Michael Theunissen, for his part, reads Negative Dialectics in abstraction from the rest of Adorno's work.⁹ Herbert Schnaedelbach maintains that Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory are interrelated.¹⁰ Helga Gripp offers as an introduction to Adorno's philosophy a volume that focuses solely on Negative Dialectics. And as I claim in my third chapter, Anke Thyen drives a wedge between Dialectic of Enlightenment and Negative Dialectics, and she leaves Aesthetic Theory out of her discussion of Adorno's concept of experience. The remarks made by these philosophers about the question whether the texts mentioned above bear any relation to one another seem to me quite casual. To the best of my knowledge, the said question has not been addressed in the secondary literature on Adorno's thought with sufficient attention to textual detail. (I understand that in his recent book on Adorno, Frederic Jameson offers an interpretation of the relation between Dialectic of Enlightenment, Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory.

Jameson's book was published too late to receive here the close scrutiny it deserves.)

My dissertation seeks to begin to illuminate the connection among Dialectic of Enlightenment, Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory. This endeavor is motivated by Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment. As I argue in the following pages, Habermas mistakenly congeals Dialectic of Enlightenment as if it were a suicidal attack against reason and thereby ends up erroneously severing it from Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory. Habermas's critique of Adorno and Horkheimer is fairly recent and has so far received scant attention. In what follows, I do not broach the question whether Adorno's philosophy is right. I limit myself to arguing, rather, that Adorno's later works, in contradistinction to Habermas's critique, do not fall into the mistake of eliding Dialectic of Enlightenment's differentiated understanding of enlightenment reason.

and domination. In his view, Dialectic of Enlightenment conceives of reason monistically as the means through which the self seeks in the course of civilization to impose an abiding identity on itself in defiance of the threats to such an identity posed by the external world and inner nature. Reason, on Habermas's interpretation of Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of the formation of subjectivity, is but a mechanism for mastery of the external environment and for the pacification of the senses. Further, Dialectic of Enlightenment, according to Habermas, incurs a performative contradiction, for--he thinks--it makes philosophical claims that are not expressive of instrumental thought. Habermas's theory of communication distinguishes between instrumental and discursive rationality, the latter being a counterfactually construed procedure that would presumably insure noncoercive communication. For Habermas, Dialectic of Enlightenment advances views that are susceptible of discursive examination, and hence it stands outside the instrumental totality he claims Adorno and Horkheimer posit. Habermas accuses Dialectic of Enlightenment of remaining oblivious to the performative contradiction he purports to register. On Habermas's interpretation, not only does Dialectic of Enlightenment fail to thematize its own rational intervention (in the sense of discursive rationality), but in addition it articulates an aporetic self-referential critique of reason. Dialectic of Enlightenment's thesis that enlightenment thinking since its

CHAPTER 1

ON HABERMAS'S DEDIFFERENTIATION OF THE DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT

In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno write:

The technical process into which the subject objectified itself after its alienation from consciousness is devoid of the multiple meanings of mythical thinking as well as of any meaning whatsoever. This is because reason became a mere means of support of the all-encompassing economic apparatus. Reason functions as the universal tool suitable for the manufacture of all other tools: it is fixatedly purposive, as fateful as the exactly calculated activity of material production, the results of which stand beyond humanity's calculation. At last, reason's ambition to be the pure organ of all ends saw itself fulfilled. The rigorousness of the laws of logic stems from the univocal character of reason's function--in the final analysis: from the coerciveness of self-preservation.¹¹

In his textual discussions of Dialectic of Enlightenment, Juergen Habermas seldom supports his criticisms by quoting from Horkheimer and Adorno's work. The passage from Dialectic of Enlightenment cited above, which passage--to the best of my knowledge--does not figure explicitly in Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment, is unusual in that it at least seems to provide **textual** support for one of Habermas's claims, namely that Adorno and Horkheimer's theory totalizes instrumental rationality. On Habermas's reading, Dialectic of Enlightenment characterizes reason as having been reduced in the course of civilization to an instrument for human self-preservation. Horkheimer and Adorno's globalization of instrumental rationality, Habermas maintains, erases the distinction between reason

inception has been implicated in and shaped by the domination of nature aims, according to Habermas, to expose all claims to the autonomy of reason as ideologically deceptive. Yet, he suggests, the thesis that reason is inextricably linked with power is self-destructive, for it corrodes its own claim to rational validity. Habermas reads Dialectic of Enlightenment as articulating a radical critique of reason, which critique, he thinks, undermines itself.

In the present chapter, I argue that Dialectic of Enlightenment does not advance a self-referential critique of reason. Habermas's criticism assumes that Dialectic of Enlightenment understands reason monolithically, reductively as instrumental rationality. According to the interpretation I offer in the following pages, Dialectic of Enlightenment does not subsume the object of its critique of the process of civilization under a univocal concept of reason. Habermas's assertion that Horkheimer and Adorno's theory is a self-referential critique of reason dedifferentiates what this theory characterizes as the dialectic of enlightenment. Dialectic of Enlightenment views enlightenment as a process, which process it does not locate in idealist fashion exclusively within the sphere of consciousness. Rather, Adorno and Horkheimer understand the process of enlightenment as being entangled in natural history. That Horkheimer and Adorno do not isolate from such a process a congealed, ahistorical and universal reason

can be gleaned from a fragment in the passage from Dialectic of Enlightenment quoted above, the fragment namely:

"...reason **became** a mere means of support of the all-encompassing economic apparatus...." (Emphasis added.)

Hence reason, for Adorno and Horkheimer, is a process. To say of such a process that it is dialectical is, for one thing, to attribute to it an abiding kernel within the different historical constellations of enlightenment rationality. The abiding kernel of enlightenment thought, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, is an antinomial relation between the cognizing subject and the material world. They argue that, in confronting the object, the subject comes to subsume it under a universalizing category, and that, in thus standardizing the object, the subject renders it manipulable in the interest of human self-preservation. Dialectic of Enlightenment maintains that the price the subject pays for gaining control of an external nature it perceives as threatening is the reification of inner nature. In order to preserve itself, the self--for Horkheimer and Adorno--must postpone instinctual satisfaction. Yet Dialectic of Enlightenment does not grasp the relation between subject and object in transhistorical fashion as if it remained unchanged. Horkheimer and Adorno think that the process of enlightenment is governed by the progressive abstraction of the cognizing subject from the material world, from nature.

Thus Dialectic of Enlightenment suggests that at the Homeric stage of enlightenment rationality, the self only incipiently begins to distance itself from its environs and affectivity in order to survive. In Homer's Odyssey, Odysseus cunningly plots his escape from the cyclops by exploiting the ambiguity of his name: on the one hand, this name bestows upon him a unique identity; on the other hand, it means 'nobody'. Upon being asked by Polyphemos to identify himself, Odysseus utters his name; according to Dialectic of Enlightenment, he thereby both asserts and denies his individuality. Odysseus assumes that Polyphemos' friends will interpret his name as meaning 'nobody', and, indeed, Homer portrays the cyclops who respond to the cries of the blinded Polyphemos as being puzzled and paralyzed by his claim that nobody attacked him. Odysseus, who for Horkheimer and Adorno is the prototypical instrumentally rational bourgeois subject, realizes that his self-preservation depends on the temporary denial of his identity. In the course of denying his identity in such a fashion, Horkheimer and Adorno remark, he comes to mimic the cyclops who are portrayed in the Odyssey as devoid of an abiding self. Odysseus eventually vanquishes the monster that threatened him and his companions with extinction; that is, he masters external nature. Yet he remains entangled in the mythical world of the cyclops to the extent that his victory presupposes that he take on their amorphous identity. That his subjectivity is still weak can be

gleaned, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment, from his need to remain tied to his ship's mast during his encounter with the sirens, lest the sensorial bliss that comes from listening to their music move him to give up the goal of reaching his native Ithaca.

Positivist science, for its part, typifies a form of enlightenment in which the separation between subject and object is more pronounced than in Homeric thought, Horkheimer and Adorno maintain. On their theory, pre-enlightenment magical practices provide a glimpse of human affinity with nature. With the scientific colonization of contemporary knowledge, however, all traces of such affinity have been lost, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment. Positivism, for Adorno and Horkheimer, converts nature into a substrate for domination, and it confines knowledge to the registration of industrially prepared facts. Positivist cognition, on their theory, is the activity of an abstractly, that is, logically unified subjectivity, which comes to be consolidated in the course of civilization. Dialectic of Enlightenment interprets the process of civilization as a process of rationalization that is impelled by the human species' anxiety-laden effort to preserve itself. The subjective, instrumental ratio, Horkheimer and Adorno claim, confronts the external world as a thing to be manipulated in the service of survival. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, positivism differs from animism, myth, magic, olympic religion and metaphysics,

in that it no longer invests nature with meaning; nature is reduced instead to a raw material for industrial production. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the positivist subject of cognition solidifies into a mechanism geared toward the operationalization of nature.

In short, they read Homer's Odyssey as documenting an archaic stage of the bourgeois subject, whose abstract and domineering interaction with nature is in their view expressive of the predominant form of enlightenment in civilization. And, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the cognizing self that informs positivist science and technology is the outcome of a process in which the subject increasingly distances itself from the material world. On their theory, the said process issues in the reification of inner nature.

Dialectic of Enlightenment does not conceive of reason as if it were atemporally fixed. Rather, it understands reason as the historical product of the subject's interaction with the material world. Dialectic of Enlightenment does not interpret the process of enlightenment as having come to an end, though it does not venture to predict its future course. Horkheimer and Adorno reject any automatic equation of enlightenment with progress. They hold that capitalism's almost fantastic productive capacity opens up the possibility of a life devoid of material suffering.

Yet, they argue, not only does capitalism fail to live up to this possibility, but it also accentuates the tendency

inherent in the process of civilization toward the loss of the human capacity to reflect upon the ends of life. Indeed, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment, the very aims of enlightenment rationality have become mystified. Adorno and Horkheimer do not foreclose the possibility of a turn away from the blind development of the productive forces implicated in the domination of nature, and they allusively conceive of an enlightenment reason that would recollect, as opposed to mechanically repeating, the history of such domination.¹² In claiming that Dialectic of Enlightenment is a self-referential critique of reason, Habermas misses Horkheimer and Adorno's historically differentiated discussion of the process of enlightenment.

Furthermore, Habermas's assertion that Dialectic of Enlightenment articulates a self-refuting critique of reason has the effect of erasing the distinction between Dialectic of Enlightenment and its object: instrumental reason. Dialectic of Enlightenment gives an inexhaustive account of the development of enlightenment thought. Its fragmented structure is consistent with its critique of systematicity, which systematicity it conceives as the aim of instrumental reason. Horkheimer and Adorno view the universal categories of metaphysics and the formalistic logical and mathematical apparatus of positivist science as instruments for the systematizing, subjective domination of nature. Insofar as systematizing, logically self-contained thought obscures its somatic, social, and historical conditions of possibility,

it is ideological, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment. Adorno and Horkheimer take Hegel's philosophy of history to be a case in point, for--they argue--its proclamation that the Prussian monarchy marks the culmination of the world spirit's march toward absolute knowledge, toward the identity between thinking and being, spirit and nature, concept and object, is delusive. But not every aspect of Hegel's philosophy is in their view tainted by a rational affirmation of the real. Horkheimer and Adorno fashion their writing after Hegelian determinate negation, which they see as the most advanced form of cognition. They do not offer a theory of determinate negation or, for that matter, of dialectics; at best, they make some scattered explanatory remarks. Their reasoning seems to be that dialectical thought proper cannot be distilled, as if to serve a methodological purpose, from its objective (sachlich) medium. In Negative Dialectics, Adorno argues that the assumption informing much of Western thought that theory can somehow be successfully purified of all material influences (be they historical, instinctual, economic or cultural) is actually governed by the psychological need for security, by the drive toward self-preservation. In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that it is erroneous to draw an absolute distinction between form and content. It is therefore no accident that they do not clarify in methodological fashion the notion of determinate negation implicit in their theoretical practice. But one

can glean from their work that they understand dialectical critique as, so to speak, immersing itself in its object, rather than rejecting the object in absolutist fashion. (In my dissertation, I seek to concretize the previous, admittedly vague claim by arguing that Adorno carries out a dialectical critique, a determinate negation of the idealist subject.) Determinate negation, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, dissolves the solidified conceptual formations characteristic of an enlightenment rationality implicated in the domination of nature for the sake of self-preservation.

In Kant's philosophy, the notion of the transcendental unity of apperception is given universal scope. Kant conceives of the spontaneous, unifying activity of consciousness in logical, and not psychological terms. Dialectic of Enlightenment argues, in contrast, that the cognizing self cannot be viewed in formalist fashion as an autarchic lawgiver to nature, as divorced from all somatic content. For Horkheimer and Adorno, not only is subjectivity immanently connected with the sensorial realm, but it is also governed by the history of the interaction between nature and spirit. Thus Kant's transcendental idealism, on their interpretation, analytically sunders the formal, transcendental ego from nature. Dialectic of Enlightenment's critique of the sovereign self posited by idealism does not advance a crude materialistic doctrine wholly destructive of the concept of the subject. On Adorno and Horkheimer's interpretation, the idealist subject

is the logical conclusion of the process of civilization, that is, of the process by which an abstract, forcibly and artificially consolidated self comes to be formed. Yet they see this abstract self's distancing from the material world as creating the space for critical reflection upon the blind advance of instrumental reason.

Horkheimer and Adorno do not confine themselves to thematizing determinate negation as the desideratum of contemporary philosophical practice; the grammar of Dialectic of Enlightenment is itself dialectical, without ever aiming in Hegelian fashion at systematic closure. Neither isolated concepts nor individual sentences fully capture the referential field to which they are related. In the present chapter, the latter assertion will be illustrated by focusing on a frequently quoted sentence near the beginning of Dialectic of Enlightenment, the sentence, namely: "Enlightenment is totalitarian."¹³ This sentence will be interpreted with reference to the immediate thematic context of which it is a part and the claim defended that its apparently conclusive, global characterization of enlightenment as being totalitarian is relativized later in the text.

For Dialectic of Enlightenment the law of noncontradiction is merely a formalistic principle. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, both the totalitarian tendency of enlightenment rationality and its emancipatory features are dialectically connected, which is to say--among

other things--that they are not merely **understood** as dialectically connected but are also **materially** linked. Although most of the sentences of Dialectic of Enlightenment are constative, they do not thereby function as apodictic, universalizing claims; for Adorno and Horkheimer, not only is enlightenment rationality a historical process, but language too, and this of course includes their own, is a historical product. Dialectic of Enlightenment does not concoct a neologistic German, and it adheres to contemporary grammatical canons. Even though Horkheimer and Adorno conceive of discursive language as having arisen in the course of the struggle by the human species to dominate nature and thus as having been molded by this struggle, their critique of instrumental reason does not purport to divest itself of the categories of a language it implicates in domination. Dialectic of Enlightenment does not understand itself as overcoming the separation between subject and object that it argues is characteristic of enlightenment reason's progressive abstraction from nature. Yet Dialectic of Enlightenment does not simply reproduce in unmediated fashion what Horkheimer and Adorno view as the linguistic apparatus of a subjectivity bent on the mastery of nature. Dialectic of Enlightenment's fractured textual presentation [Darstellung] and the paratactic structure of its paragraphs subvert the systematizing logic it ascribes to a formalistic enlightenment reason oblivious of its genesis in the domination of nature.

The sentence 'Enlightenment is totalitarian' mirrors in its succinctness, grammatical autonomy, and apodictic semblance the imperious, yet artificial conclusiveness of the factual assertions of positivistic science. That its meaning is contingent upon the thematic medium where it is situated, as I will argue below, disqualifies it as a protocol statement, for it does not register a readily visible fact--whatever this might mean. Insofar as Adorno and Horkheimer conceive of determinate negation as corrosive of instrumental reason and as opening the way toward a form of enlightenment rationality cognizant of the ratio's abstraction from nature, the exhaustiveness with which a totalitarian disposition might appear at first to be predicated of enlightenment in the sentence mentioned above vanishes.

In addition to stressing that Adorno and Horkheimer conceive of enlightenment as a dialectical process and that they eschew imposing systematic closure on Dialectic of Enlightenment, my criticism of Habermas's assertion that the critique of instrumental reason engages in a self-referential attack against reason will underscore the following: Dialectic of Enlightenment's discussion of the process of the diremption of the archaic linguistic symbol into sign and image; its materialist account of the genesis of Greek metaphysical categories; and its use of the past tense to claim that there was a link between such categories and social domination. That Horkheimer and

Adorno understand the process of enlightenment as bringing about the separation between sign and image, read Greek metaphysics as entangled in social processes, and grammatically emphasize that the connection between Greek universals and power is a past phenomenon, makes it clear that Dialectic of Enlightenment views its object historically.

Dialectic of Enlightenment does not conceive of reason monistically. Further, it does not fix the bounds of thought and language after the fashion of idealism, which elides the materiality of the human species' commerce with nature. Dialectic of Enlightenment evades the aporia of self-destructive self-referentiality with which Habermas seeks to burden it: it does not dehistoricize language and rationality, and thus it avoids hypostatizing its referent; it does not identify itself with the power commitments it ascribes to ancient metaphysical categories; and it not does understand itself as if it were fully autonomous from the material process upon which it reflects and by which it is conditioned.

According to Dialectic of Enlightenment:

Dialectics...reveals every image as script. It reads in the image's features the confession of falsity. In extracting this confession, dialectics disempowers the image and commits itself to truth. Language is therefore more than a mere system of signs. With the concept of determinate negation, Hegel stressed an element of enlightenment that distinguishes it from the positivist disintegration he imputed to it.¹⁴

Adorno and Horkheimer secularize and politicize the biblical prohibition on graven images: they argue that premature attempts at picturing utopia defuse the critical power of the idea of utopia. On their view, positivism, like myth, idolizes facticity and faces it as if it were immutable. Positivism, they claim, extols the formalistic language of mathematized science as if such language were the avenue toward true knowledge, that is, as if a positivistically understood science were adequate to the material world. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, positivism is the tautology of a social world they think has become progressively more administered; on this view, positivism thus sanctions the prevalent social order. Mathematized knowledge, Adorno and Horkheimer maintain, mirrors the objectification of nature at the hands of a human species driven to preserve itself. Dialectics, as they understand it, exposes the positivist registration of facts as a photograph, so to speak, of petrified nature. On this theory, positivism makes manifest a process before which it passively acquiesces, namely the enlightenment process in which the self comes to rigidify itself on account of the instinctual demands made upon it by civilization and a commodified social world destructive of use-values comes into existence. To be sure, Horkheimer and Adorno do not conceive of determinate negation as automatically dissolving every positive fact. The abstract totalizing rejection of the world is, on their view, no

different from any theodicy in that it falsely professes to have access to absolute knowledge. Globalizing world-views that abstractly negate facticity, Horkheimer and Adorno aver, are feeble challenges against its deification under the aegis of ancient and positivist mythologies.

Dialectics, as they conceive of it, locates change not merely in the domain of thought but in the objective sphere as well.

Indeed, in tracing dialectics back to preanimism, Adorno and Horkheimer state:

When a tree is no longer described merely as a tree but also as evidence of something different from itself, as the locus of mana, language expresses the contradiction that a thing is at once itself and other than itself, identical and non-identical....The concept, which is all too readily defined as the unifying characteristic [Merkmalseinheit] of what it grasps, was from the beginning rather the product of dialectical thinking, wherein each thing always is only what it is insofar as it becomes what it is not.¹⁵

Perhaps the following remarks will elucidate the previous passage. Adorno and Horkheimer offer an admittedly fragmentary account of what they term the dialectic of enlightenment, by which they mean, for one thing, to underscore the historicity and conflictual character of enlightenment. Dialectic of Enlightenment presents the rudiments of a phenomenology of enlightenment, though it most certainly does not purport to confer logical autonomy or teleological foresight to the concept of enlightenment. Horkheimer and Adorno object to society-affirming, positivistically informed historiography. Unlike such

historiography, they do not conceal their critical, interpretive engagement with their object. But in contradistinction to idealism, they do not dematerialize thought.

Enlightenment, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, already manifests itself in myth. Early rituals, they argue, contained an **idea** of the event and process to be influenced. They add that this **theoretical** element of myth finds expression in the earliest epics. "...The myths that the tragedians found stand already under the discipline and power Bacon glorifies as the goal [of Enlightenment knowledge]...."¹⁶ And the solar, patriarchal myths, as linguistically developed totalities, are, on their reading, expressive of enlightenment reason. "...Myth wished to report, name, tell the origin; and hence: to represent, hold [festhalten], explain...."¹⁷ In contrast, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment, the enlightenment element of mythical thought and language, which, as logos, sought to give narrative accounts of events, is jettisoned by positivistic thought. Yet, even though myth incorporates elements of enlightenment, it is not identical to enlightenment's positivist form and industrial content, that is, to contemporary enlightenment's mythological adaptation to facticity. "...Animism ensouled objects; industrialism objectifies the soul...."¹⁸

The sentence 'Enlightenment is totalitarian' seems to bring the dialectic of enlightenment to a halt. An

imperialist drive to cover all of logical space might lead one to impregnate the word 'enlightenment' in the previous sentence with all the meanings phenomenologically laid out in the text. 'Enlightenment', at the hands of Adorno and Horkheimer, would appear to be a congealed concept, yet a concept immanently too conflictual for rational stabilization. On their theory, however, this concept is determined by and at once effective of the domination of nature, which domination does not take place in a transhistorically uniform fashion. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that enlightenment **is** the conceptual reflection of the human attempt at mastering nature, and that, as a historical process, the domination of nature undergoes change, **becomes** other than itself. Hence, for them, enlightenment itself is a process. The grammar of 'enlightenment is totalitarian' conceals the dynamic force they ascribe to the process of enlightenment; the subject seems exhaustively to be subsumed under the predicate. If taken in isolation, this sentence would appear to stand outside the phenomenological movement of the text. If the sentence did indeed engulf all the meanings that the authors of Dialectic of Enlightenment attribute to the concept enlightenment, deductive rigor would exact the conclusion that determinate negation, which they associate with a phase of enlightenment rationality and which they claim to practice, is itself totalitarian. But it is precisely the totalitarianism of Hegel's system, the fact

that it imposes closure on the dialectical movement of spirit, that Adorno and Horkheimer target for criticism. Does their positive valuation of Hegelian determinate negation sophomorically contradict the claim that enlightenment is totalitarian?

On a more circumscribed reading of the sentence, it becomes clear that it stresses the claim preceding it, namely the claim: "...Regardless of the myths to which the opposition [to enlightenment] might appeal, such myths evince their allegiance to the principle of destructive rationality they impute to enlightenment insofar as in their opposition to enlightenment they mobilize arguments..." 19 Horkheimer and Adorno think that to oppose enlightenment as being the principle of a destructive reason (after the fashion of romanticist critiques of the Enlightenment, for example) is at once to step into enlightenment's own terrain, that is, into the terrain of argumentation. Such opposition thus annuls itself. To be sure, Adorno and Horkheimer criticize enlightenment as tending toward the establishment of universal abstract equality. They maintain that under advanced capitalism exchange value tends to become ubiquitous, invading the realms of art and thought and molding human relationships. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, bourgeois justice pays lip service to the principle of human equality, and capitalism concretizes its own version of the principle in the form of abstract labor.

Adorno and Horkheimer seek to expose the societal impulse toward abstract equality as a coercive, dedifferentiating force. Under the aegis of instrumental reason, they hold, human beings tend to be standardized, that is, robbed of their individual qualities. The sentence 'enlightenment is totalitarian' gives expression to what for Horkheimer and Adorno is the imperiousness of abstractive thought and instrumental action.

Yet they do not absolutize (that is, dehistoricize, universalize) the truth-content of the said sentence. Adorno and Horkheimer see in enlightenment rationality a residue of the capacity for anamnesis, for recollection of the natural medium out of which they think thought arose. Enlightenment reason, they maintain, distances itself from nature in order to render it a substratum for domination. They nonetheless interpret the distance thus gained as creating the space for reflection upon the violence inherent in nature. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, such violence is not a thing of the past, and it finds modern expression in economic exploitation, cultural manipulation and an intensified instinctual repression. As subjective nature's reflection upon its self-mutilation, as human nature's remembrance of its self-alienation, enlightenment is not encapsulated by the blind, instrumental logic that continues to drive scientific and technological progress, Adorno and Horkheimer aver. They anchor their resistance to what they view as the

totalitarian force of instrumental-enlightenment's domination of nature in an enlightenment theory that understands itself as the anamnesis of reason's entwinement with domination, that is, as the anamnesis of suffering. On the theory advanced in Dialectic of Enlightenment, a mechanized contemporary consciousness militates against the actualization of the potential immanent in today's world to relieve material suffering.

Horkheimer and Adorno argue that universalizing concepts owe their imperialism to societal domination. "...The universality of thoughts [Die Allgemeinheit der Gedanken], as discursive logic develops them, that is, domination in the sphere of the concept, emerges from the foundation of domination in reality...."²⁰ The social division of labor, with its attendant power differential, is the condition of possibility of conceptualization, according to Adorno and Horkheimer. "The subject's distance from the object, the presupposition of abstraction, is grounded in the distance to the thing [Distanz zur Sache] that the master wins through those that are dominated...."²¹ Greek philosophical categories, their aura of autonomy notwithstanding, are linked in Dialectic of Enlightenment to the material circumstances in which they arise. Thus:

The philosophical concepts through which Plato and Aristotle represent the world elevated, by means of the claim to universal validity, the conditions they justified to the status of true

actuality. They stemmed, as can be found in Vico, from the Athenian marketplace; they reflected with the same clarity the laws of physics, equality among full citizens, and the inferiority of women, children and slaves.²²

For Horkheimer and Adorno, though, to the extent that reality remained incongruous with metaphysical concepts, metaphysics--in spite of itself--retained the possibility of disclosing social injustice. On their theory, abstract thought, though founded on the power differential between master and slave, makes criticism of its own material base possible, since it constitutes itself by distancing itself from the said base. Universal concepts, however, conceal their involvement in societal domination, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment. And in purporting to express immutable truths, Horkheimer and Adorno imply, such concepts feign to break their connection with history. The dominant form of enlightenment, instrumental reason, is nominalistic, Adorno and Horkheimer hold. In its systematic formalism, they claim, it blocks conceptual access to its origin in and indebtedness to the domination of nature. Enlightenment rationality, on the view advanced in Dialectic of Enlightenment, tends to become a ubiquitous instrumental calculus, thereby repressing the memory of its genesis in the coercive pacification of the senses.

Adorno and Horkheimer's reflection on reason's material roots taps the critical potential immanent in the separation between subject and object to render Greek metaphysics and modern positivism the objects of a critique

that exposes their false claims to universality and systematicity. For Dialectic of Enlightenment, their obliviousness of their material conditions of possibility bears the signature of their incompleteness. Dialectic of Enlightenment's materialist account of the genesis of concepts contributes to its attempt at a determinate negation of their false positivity.

Adorno and Horkheimer use the past tense in their discussion of the connection between Platonic and Aristotelian concepts, on the one hand, and societal domination, on the other hand:

Language itself **conferred** upon what was said, upon the relations of domination, that universality which it had acquired as a means of communication [Verkehrsmittel] in a bourgeois society. Metaphysical rigor [Nachdruck], the sanction of ideas and norms, **was** nothing but the hypostatization of the severity and exclusiveness that concepts **had** to assume wherever language **unified** [zusammenschloss] the ruling community around the exercise of command. In strengthening the societal power of language, ideas **became** the more superfluous the more this power **increased**, and the language of science **brought** about their end.²³ (Emphasis added.)

The past tense marks the fate that according to Horkheimer and Adorno befell the old philosophical categories in the course of a progressive disenchanting enlightenment critique. The Enlightenment, they aver, detected traces of animism in metaphysical concepts:

The Enlightenment...recognized in the Platonic and Aristotelian legacy within metaphysics the old [demonic] powers, and it persecuted the truth-claim of universals as superstition. It claims to discern in the authority of universal concepts the persistence of the fear of demons.

It was through images [Abbilder] of such demons in magic ritual that human beings sought to influence nature. From now on, matter is finally to be dominated without the illusion of prevalent [waltender] or immanent [innewohnender] powers, of hidden attributes.²⁴

"...Concepts are to the Enlightenment what pensioners are to industrial trusts: no one may feel secure...." ²⁵

Dialectic of Enlightenment does not interpret the Enlightenment's suppression of metaphysics as a purely intellectual phenomenon but also as a process welded to progressive industrialization, to the mechanization of thought and nature. Adorno and Horkheimer diagnose this process as leading to the self-destruction of enlightenment:

Enlightenment as bourgeois **had** long before Turgot and d'Alembert positivistically **lost** itself. It **was** never immune to the conflation of freedom with the business of self-preservation. The suspension of the concept [die Suspension des Begriffes], whether in the name of progress or culture, both of which since long ago surreptitiously **colluded** against truth, **gave** free rein to the lie. This lie **could** no longer be distinguished from a truth neutralized as a cultural commodity in a world that confined itself to the verification of protocol statements and preserved thought, devalued to the achievement of great thinkers, as a kind of obsolete headline.²⁶ (Emphasis added.)

Furthermore:

With the relinquishment of thinking, which in its objectified form as mathematics, machinery and organization avenges itself on its forgetful humans [an den seiner vergessenden Menschen sich raecht], enlightenment **renounced** its own realization.²⁷ (Emphasis added.)

The very subjectivity that by means of calculation, cunning and instinctual renunciation, sought to master nature, to

differentiate itself from nature, for the sake of its own survival, ends up objectifying itself, resembling the blind action of natural forces, Adorno and Horkheimer maintain. Dialectic of Enlightenment marks its distance from what it takes to be a mechanical enlightenment by plotting the latter's course in the past tense.

Both Dialectic of Enlightenment's historically sensitive reconstruction of the origin of metaphysical concepts in societal domination and its notion that positivism mimics at the level of thought nature's fate under industrialism suggest that the critique of instrumental reason is not self-refuting, Habermas's claim to the contrary notwithstanding.

A sentence from the chapter on the culture industry might suggest that Adorno and Horkheimer globally conceive of language as having been reduced in the course of demythologization to an instrument for the uncritical description of facticity. "...The blindness and muteness of data, to which positivism reduces the world, invade language itself [geht auf die Sprache selber ueber], which confines itself to the registration of such data...."²⁸ It might seem that the authors of Dialectic of Enlightenment incur what Habermas terms a performative contradiction, for their own language understands itself as going beyond, as critically confronting the world of facts. Yet only if the said sentence is analytically sundered from its thematic

medium does it retain the semblance of apodicticity. Adorno and Horkheimer problematize the debasement of language in advertising, which they think robs words of any meaning linked to autonomous experience. On their theory, language is rendered formulaic for the purpose of mobilizing consumers to reproduce capitalism; words are instrumentalized as abstract signs devoid of any meaningful content; and the jargon of the advertising industry is positivistically fitted to an economy that manufactures demand for such items as breath deodorizer.

But Dialectic of Enlightenment does not ahistorically fix the object of its account of language; in fact, it views language as historically conditioned. Adorno and Horkheimer take hieroglyphs to indicate that words functioned originally not only as signs but also as images. They maintain that with the division of intellectual labor science and interpretation [Deutung] come to be separated, and that their separation is reflected within language. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, science manipulates signs, whereas the different arts find expression in images, tones and the actual word [eigentliches Wort]. "...As sign, language must resign itself to calculation; in order to understand nature, it must renounce the claim to be like nature. As image [Bild], language must resign itself to reproduction [Abbild]; in order wholly to be nature [um ganz Natur zu sein], it must renounce the claim to know nature...."29

Horkheimer and Adorno argue that at a later historical stage scientific formalism--with its positivist, scientific scaffolding--folds into the aestheticism of a system of detached signs, while art resorts under the aegis of the culture industry to a technology grounded in positivist science to become the tautology of industrial society. On this theory, the two separate bourgeois spheres, science and art, end up dialectically clasping each other.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, though, the process of enlightenment also makes autonomous works of art possible, which transcend the mere picturing of facticity. As I will explain in more detail later in the dissertation, Adorno's Aesthetic Theory elaborates on Dialectic of Enlightenment's admittedly allusive account of the autonomous art of the bourgeois era. In Aesthetic Theory, Adorno thematizes what he sees as the cognitive content of autonomous art works: they are said there to give expression to the largely unacknowledged history of the civilizational domination of nature, that is, to repressed suffering. According to Adorno, autonomous works of art do not paper over society's fissures; in them, the particular, what is not subsumable under a system, is given expression. The mimetic expressiveness of autonomous works of art, Adorno argues, subverts the instrumental-enlightenment predilection for systematic conceptual assemblages. He claims that such works do not confront nature discursively or

quantitatively, as if to dominate it, but that they instead give expression to the qualitative diversity of the material world.

Positivism and its aesthetic analogue, the culture industry, mimic the industrial reification of nature, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment. Its textual layout aims to dismantle what Horkheimer and Adorno understand as the coercive instrumental-logical apparatus informing positivist science and the culture industry. To be sure, Horkheimer and Adorno self-consciously retain a conceptuality rent from mimetic expression. Indeed they maintain that the opposition between image and sign cannot be simply conjured away. Yet, they contend, to hypostatize each element of the opposition in its (bourgeois) isolation is uncritically to preserve an aestheticized science and a technologized art. On their theory, to absolutize the distinction between image and sign, to dehistoricize the said distinction, is to give up the space wherein criticism of the instrumental-rational domination of nature can take root.

The language of Dialectic of Enlightenment alludes to a mimetic, non-manipulative relation with nature, without thereby summarily dismissing the grammar and categories of the philosophical tradition to which the said text does not cease to belong. Adorno and Horkheimer pay homage to Western enlightenment by employing abstract concepts, that is, categories that forcibly synthesize the sensorial

manifold; they deride it by refusing to reach theoretical closure. Dialectic of Enlightenment both preserves and goes beyond linguistic signification. In opposition to nominalism, Adorno and Horkheimer assume that their language is non-arbitrarily related to its object, which is enlightenment's collusion with domination. But Dialectic of Enlightenment does not confine itself to denotation, which it transcends by endeavoring to give a voice to a nature repressed by instrumental reason. Dialectic of Enlightenment's fragmentary presentation echoes the fissures immanent in industrial society, which are papered over by the said society's affirmative ideology. The sentences of Dialectic of Enlightenment are not governed by the regime of deductive systematicity, which for Adorno and Horkheimer merely reflects at the level of logic the division of labor, that is, social coercion. Such sentences are arranged, rather, around thematic foci, without the meaning of each sentence thereby being fully determined by the linguistic constellation in which it figures. The relative autonomy of each sentence aids in Dialectic of Enlightenment's opposition to the coercive, hierarchical ordering of thoughts. The paratactic arrangement of the sentences of Dialectic of Enlightenment subverts the artificial polarization of thought into immutable, apodictic, irreplaceable truths--capital--and transient, contingent, exchangeable examples--labor.

According to Gunzelin Schmid Noerr:

[Horkheimer's reflections beginning in 1939 on the philosophy of language]...link up with earlier critique of ideology remarks about language, especially with those that refer to logical positivism's conception of language....Horkheimer radicalizes the earlier approach, turning it into an aporetic critique of the concept [Kritik des Begriffs]. The critique remains aporetic insofar as, in grasping language as the means of overpowering the object, it renders obsolete its own standard of a language that is not instrumentally circumscribed. Language, according to Horkheimer..., inextricably contains both the power to repress the particular and the force to liberate the particular from such repression, to reconcile the particular with the universal. Both the negative and the positive sides of this critique appear in Dialectic of Enlightenment, though without mediation....The thesis of the universality of the context of delusion [Verblendungszusammenhang] carries with it the complementary thesis that the spell over humanity and things could be broken with one stroke, if only the redemptive word were to be spoken.³⁰

Schmid Noerr thus offers a language-oriented analogue of a criticism that Habermas, the vauntful executor of the linguistic turn in critical theory, directs at Dialectic of Enlightenment by focusing on its understanding of reason. Habermas holds that Adorno and Horkheimer universalize instrumental reason, and that they thereby end up undermining the discursive rationality that he thinks makes the critique of instrumental reason possible. Schmid Noerr, for her part, claims that Dialectic of Enlightenment totalizingly characterizes language as being instrumental, but that it nonetheless ascribes to language the capacity to overcome instrumentalization. She argues that Horkheimer and Adorno present an antinomial conception

of language, and that they leave the said conception unproblematized.

Yet Schmid Noerr's assertion that Horkheimer and Adorno interpret language equivocally as having both the power to excise the incommensurable, the particular, and the force to liberate the particular from the grip of discursive logic is mistaken. Dialectic of Enlightenment does indeed reject logical systematicity, but it only undermines such systematicity **performatively**. It is also misleading for her to suggest that Dialectic of Enlightenment discusses language in contradictory fashion as harboring both an oppressive and an emancipatory potential, and that the contradiction is left unresolved, for Adorno and Horkheimer do not go beyond **allegorically** evoking a non-instrumental, mimetic interaction with nature. Dialectic of Enlightenment's allusive moment is not historicized. Horkheimer and Adorno do not conceptually crystallize their yearning for utopia, for they take the conceptual language by means of which they trace the process of enlightenment to be a temporally stabilized, prosaic, disenchanted language. What they yearn for would be a society free from domination, a community of free individuals, and this--they maintain--the light of reason cannot by itself render visible, let alone bring about.

Horkheimer and Adorno secularize and politicize the prohibition in Jewish religion against naming God in vain.

Just as Jewish religion--on their interpretation--retains the utopian bond between name and being by proscribing the false use of God's name, they refrain in Dialectic of Enlightenment from attempting to describe true community. Dialectic of Enlightenment does not purport to erase the distinction between language and object. Adorno and Horkheimer take representations of the ideal society in the absence of an emancipatory praxis to be vacuous. Like the positivist registration of facts, such representations enfeeble language and hence remain passive toward the world's course, Dialectic of Enlightenment suggests.

The dialectic of enlightenment, as it is characterized by Adorno and Horkheimer, issues both in the ratio's repression of its materiality, of its natural medium, and in the division between mental and manual labor. Yet what they see as enlightenment's self-reflection upon its entanglement with domination (indeed, Dialectic of Enlightenment) rests on conceptual alienation from the fetishized conditions of contemporary social life, that is, it rests on sublimation. Dialectic of Enlightenment too is implicated in the dialectic of enlightenment, for the division of labor is its social condition of possibility. Thus, in a sense, it is correct to say that Horkheimer and Adorno's text is self-contradictory, though this is to give expression to a truism. In a world in which Salvadoran peasants, union organizers, students and teachers are cannon fodder, according to the country's owners and to

some in Langley and Washington, critical reflection is inherently paradoxical, that is, estranged from its material base. Both Habermas's claim that Dialectic of Enlightenment is corrosive of its own rational element and Schmid Noerr's remark that it undermines its own discourse by globally conceiving of language as the subject's instrument for mastering the object rest on the assumption that the proper role of philosophical reason and language is to remain detached from their materiality. It is in this light that Habermas inquires into the rational justification of Adorno and Horkheimer's diagnosis of the self-destructive dynamic of enlightenment. Yet he passes over in silence the claim implicit in Dialectic of Enlightenment that the abscission of the corporeal from the mental is the result of a violent historical process. Dialectic of Enlightenment seeks to contribute toward preventing the compulsive repetition of the said process.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICISM AND RATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION IN HABERMAS'S CRITIQUE OF DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT

According to Habermas, the first generation of critical theorists failed philosophically to ground the notion of reason in virtue of which they held advanced industrial society to be irrational.³¹ Habermas understands his theory of communicative action as a defense of concepts of rationality and a rational society. In his attempt at laying firm rational foundations for critical social theory, Habermas claims systematically to organize his philosophy around the concept of communicative rationality. He construes communicative rationality counterfactually as a deliberative procedure in which all participants are free to ask questions, raise objections, propose ideas and courses of action, and the like. In the ideal communicative situation imagined by Habermas, that is to say, speech would not be coercively interrupted. In Habermas's theoretical system, modernity is interpreted as facilitating social evolution in the direction of communicative rationality;³² the subject's autonomy and moral worthiness are said to have communicative rationality as their condition of possibility;³³ and social processes, cultural formations, philosophy and sociology are all measured against the canons set by the notion of communicative rationality.

Habermas thinks that his philosophy, unlike the early critical theory, is reflexive, his reason being that it recognizes the possibility of being critically examined

under conditions of coercion-free communication. Habermas conceives of truth as intersubjective consensus and of rational communication as the only legitimate avenue for attaining such a consensus. Thus his theory of communicative action is in his view reflexive by virtue of thematizing the deliberative setting in which its truth could be decided upon.

Habermas argues that Horkheimer and Adorno engage in a self-destructive critique of reason, a critique he sees as too radical to leave any ground wherein they could rationally anchor their theory. He takes it to be the task of a critical theory of society to disclose the potential for rationality immanent in bourgeois institutions and culture. Habermas claims to locate such a potential in communicative action, which he defines as social action oriented towards reaching intersubjective understanding. He assumes that embedded in all communication is the expectation of intersubjective agreement. To the best of my knowledge, Habermas does not distinguish between 'agreement' and 'understanding'. His reasoning seems to be that ideal speech would issue in consensus, and that the understanding of speech-acts is inseparable from taking a position with respect to their validity. Habermas conceives of communication in terms of speech-act theory; he believes that semantic analysis and the Chomskian rational reconstruction of linguistic competence miss the pragmatic and intersubjective character of all language. Speech-acts,

Habermas maintains, have as their telos intersubjective understanding, for--he thinks--they inherently raise claims to validity that are susceptible of discursive evaluation. Habermas characterizes discourses as avenues for the problematization of the validity of speech-acts, which validity is usually taken for granted in contexts of everyday communication. Discursive argumentation alone, in his view, is productive of truth, which he understands counterfactually as consensus among all possible rational participants in dialogue. Ideal speech communication, according to Habermas, liberates theoretic and practical questions from paleo-symbolic and purposive-rational distortion.³⁴ Discursive action, for Habermas, would make it possible for speakers to achieve self-transparency about their knowledge of the external world, their practical goals and their affective needs.

Communicative action, according to Habermas, takes root in the rationalized lifeworld of modernity. Habermas defines the lifeworld as the domain of everyday, nontheoretical understanding, and he thinks that in the course of modernization it has freed itself from the constrictive monopoly of religious and metaphysical world-views. Further, Habermas sees the modern lifeworld as having resisted colonization by the imperatives of subsystems of purposive-rational action. The lifeworld, in Habermas's view, harbors the possibility of communicative rationality--traces of which can be found, he maintains,

within the household and in the media³⁵--against the progressive dissemination of non-linguistic means for the coordination of social action, against the dissemination, namely, of money and bureaucratic power. Thus, for Habermas, the ideal speech situation is not a vacuous utopistic construct: he points to extant structures, cultural formations, theories and personality-types that anticipate communication aimed at consensus. Parliamentary democracy, the decentering of world-views and of subjectivity, the universalization of morality and law [Recht], the increased communicative reflexivity of social formations, the substitution of subject-centered thought by the paradigm of linguistic intersubjectivity:³⁶ Habermas takes these to be conditions of possibility for communicative rationality. But in addition to attempting to historicize the concept of the ideal speech situation by locating the presuppositions of its genesis in modernity, Habermas invests this concept--to be sure, a counterfactual category--with practical significance: the idea of communicative rationality is to serve as a critical measure of the rationality of current societies and cultural formations.

Indeed Habermas seeks to anchor his critique of Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment in the notion of distortion-free communication. Dialectic of Enlightenment is found to be wanting by Habermas precisely for failing to thematize the normative content, the rational

potential of communicative action. Dialectic of Enlightenment, according to Habermas, does not exit the framework of the philosophy of consciousness, for--he claims--it conceives of knowledge as the activity of a self-centered subject presumed to be the sole legislator of truth and meaning; and it conceives of labor as the instrumental action of an autarchic subject against a natural environment that this subject deems to be threatening. Furthermore, Habermas understands Dialectic of Enlightenment as globalizing instrumental rationality. In his view, Horkheimer and Adorno condense the course of human civilization in philosophico-historical fashion into a process of the instrumentalization of thinking and action, a process the telos of which is--on Habermas's account--the total triumph of a rationality incapable of problematizing the ends of human life. A subject-centered conception of knowledge and labor and the reduction of reason to its instrumental form, Habermas argues, make it impossible for Dialectic of Enlightenment to recognize the potential for rationality immanent in the lifeworld.

In what follows, I advance the view that Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment displays fissures, which call into question the coherence he ascribes to his theoretical system.³⁷ Rational critique and historicist understanding cohabitate in his discussion of Dialectic of Enlightenment, but their union is not even sanctioned by common law. According to Habermas's universal pragmatics of

language, the understanding of speech-acts necessarily involves critically determining their validity. The failure of Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment consistently to abide by the regime imposed by his pragmatics of language casts doubt on his assumption that this critique, unlike its object, promotes movement in the direction of communicative rationality.

In The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment, Habermas writes:

In the tradition of the Enlightenment, enlightening thinking was understood both in opposition and as the counterforce to myth. In opposition [to myth], because it posits the uncoercive force of the better argument against the authoritarian compulsoriness of a tradition interlocked with the chain of the generations.³⁸

The first sentence in the passage makes a historical claim about the Enlightenment's self-understanding, a self-understanding which in Habermas's view, incidentally, is not marred by ideological deception. (Horkheimer and Adorno, in contrast, argue in Dialectic of Enlightenment that myth and enlightenment are not entirely different from each other. In Homer's Odyssey, they contend, the mythical account of Odysseus' encounter with the sirens incorporates instrumental-rational elements. Odysseus, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment, cunningly plots his self-preservation by having himself tied to the ship's mast. He knows that, otherwise, the seductive power of the sirens' singing would prevent him from ever reaching his goal, which is to return to his native Ithaca. And the productivist

rationality prevalent in modern industrial society, Adorno and Horkheimer maintain, resembles in its blindness to its course and desirability mythical compulsiveness and enclosure.)

In the second sentence, however, Habermas eschews the question of how the tradition of the Enlightenment understood itself. Rather, he interprets that tradition from the standpoint of his concept of the uncoercive force of the better argument. This concept figures in his universal pragmatics of language, according to which neither deductive closure nor a putative correspondence between language and the external world define validity and truth. Logical and semantic analysis, Habermas argues, fails to account for the intersubjective character of all language, whereas correspondence theories of truth are said by him to be engaged in the futile attempt to exit language: facts, for Habermas, are linguistically constituted. Truth, which he understands as the result of an uncoerced universal consensus, can only be forged, he believes, in the practical circumstances of discursive argumentation. The notion of the uncoercive force of the better argument is inseparable from the concept of undistorted intersubjective communication. Habermas assumes that in the course of discursive deliberations the better argument will win out. He does not offer substantive criteria for distinguishing between good and bad arguments. He limits himself to imagining that in the context of free linguistic exchange a

consensus will crystallize around the most persuasive reasons, be they as they may.

But regardless of its merits, a universal pragmatics of language does not automatically lead to the conclusion that a communicative, discursive view of knowledge is definitive of enlightenment. In point of fact, Habermas's own discussion of Kant in Labor and Interaction³⁹ renders the definition of enlightenment in terms of the uncoercive force of the better argument problematic. In that essay, Habermas argues that Hegel's Jena writings articulate, in contrast to Kant, a subjectivity that is mediated, and not an isolated, monological transcendental unity of apperception. In these writings, Hegel, according to Habermas, maintains that the self is constituted both through an intersubjective struggle for recognition within the laboring process and through communicative interaction. Habermas claims that, in contradistinction to Hegel, Kant's conception of the self posits a singular subject of cognition who synthesizes the sensorial manifold and who obeys the moral law in abstraction from the intersubjectivity of the ethical realm [Sittlichkeit], from the objectivity of spirit [Geist], that is to say. Habermas imputes to Hegel's Jena writings the view that both labor and interaction are linguistically mediated.

But if the theoretical and practical activities of self-consciousness for Kant are not linguistically intersubjective and the distinguishing mark of the

Enlightenment were a communicative conception of rationality, Kant's position as an Enlightenment philosopher could hardly be elucidated. Perhaps communicative rationality cunningly, surreptitiously asserts itself in his work or, maybe, Kant does not belong in the tradition of the Enlightenment. Habermas's passage on the distinction between myth and enlightenment articulates an aporetic history: to the extent that it characterizes the Enlightenment in terms of a universal pragmatics of language that claims to have rendered the monological subjectivity of transcendental idealism obsolete, it threatens to jettison Kant's philosophy from the tradition of the Enlightenment; yet Habermas does place Kant's philosophy squarely within that tradition.⁴⁰

But perhaps Habermas's claim that enlightenment thinking posits [entgegenstellt] the uncoercive force of the better argument against the authority of traditional knowledge does not refer to the content of enlightenment philosophies. Perhaps Habermas means to argue that enlightenment thinking distinguishes itself from traditional knowledge by making discursively redeemable validity-claims and that a central feature of enlightenment rationality is that disputes about the truth of propositions and the validity of moral and aesthetic claims revolve solely around the cogency of the arguments offered in support of the different positions. On this interpretation, Kant's notion of a subject of knowledge that is not communicatively

constituted would not be pertinent to the distinction between enlightenment and tradition. Instead, only the answer to the question whether the persuasiveness of Kant's arguments can be discursively established, whether their "uncoercive force" can be measured in the context of undistorted communication, could determine whether he is to be placed within the Enlightenment.

Thus if Habermas's category of the uncoercive force of the better argument is to be the criterion for marking enlightenment argumentation off from myth and tradition, the assessment of whether such argumentation is indeed of the enlightenment could only take place within the framework of distortion-free deliberation. Habermas seems to think the reconstruction of the history of enlightenment rationality from the perspective of the ideal speech situation possible. It remains a desideratum of his theoretical project, however, to show that there is such a thing as an enlightenment progress **driven by the triumph of superior arguments**. Since the measure of the superiority of such arguments, for Habermas, could only be given by consensual agreement among participants in discursive communication, his characterization of enlightenment thinking in terms of the notion of the uncoercive force of the better argument rests on the strange assumption that retrospective judgment about enlightenment arguments can already be passed on the basis of a prospective ideal speech situation. The assumption is strange because, as is well known, Habermas's

counterfactual category of an ideal speech situation establishes procedural criteria for undistorted communication; such a category, therefore, could not supply substantive criteria for deciding upon the cogency of arguments that have been made in the course of the history of enlightenment thinking. Nor can Habermas's at once prospective and retrospective proceduralism settle the question whether such arguments are genuinely **enlightenment** arguments.

Habermas characterizes the Enlightenment in historicist fashion, that is, in terms of its self-understanding, but he also interprets it from the standpoint of his theory of communicative action as being directed toward communicative rationality. Yet as my discussion of Kant above suggests, Habermas fails to harmonize his own paradigm of linguistic intersubjectivity with philosophies centered on a subject that they understand in abstraction from communicative processes. As a matter of fact, his theory of communicative action claims to have overcome such philosophies. His discussion of Dialectic of Enlightenment wavers too between a historicist account of its object and a critique launched from the perspective of the notion of communicative rationality.

Habermas claims that Dialectic of Enlightenment does not cease to intend to have an enlightening effect, its radicalization of the critique of ideology [Ideologiekritik] notwithstanding. As practiced by the Frankfurt School in

the 1930s, the critique of ideology, according to Habermas, affirmed the potential for a rational social order inherent in bourgeois culture and institutions: it was precisely the normative content of the ideals of freedom, justice and equality, he avers, that permitted a critique of the failure of bourgeois social formations to live up to these (their) ideals. The promise for a just social order held out by the admittedly distorted rational content of modernity, Habermas maintains, gave the critique of ideology an emancipatory intent. In his view, Dialectic of Enlightenment overtaxes the critique of ideology: Horkheimer and Adorno's work, says Habermas, turns the suspicion of ideological distortion against reason itself. Habermas reads Dialectic of Enlightenment as conceiving of modern enlightenment rationality in reductionistic fashion, for--he claims--it collapses the distinction between rational validity and power. For Habermas, Adorno and Horkheimer think the differentiation between reason and a calculating understanding no longer operative, the latter having assimilated the former, since instrumental rationality replaces contemplation about human ends with a thoroughgoing operationalism. Dialectic of Enlightenment, he proceeds, thereby uncouples its diagnosis of the process of enlightenment from any affirmation of the normative content of modernity.

But in implicating reason in the domination of nature, Habermas contends, Dialectic of Enlightenment incurs a

performative contradiction: he holds that it undercuts the rational, normative validity-claims it itself makes about instrumental reason. He asks: if reason is inextricable from power, wherefrom does the critique that makes such a claim derive its normative force? Habermas subjects Dialectic of Enlightenment to a kind of critique of ideology: on his view, the book's own rational, critical intervention belies the negative instrumental totality he says it posits. Habermas highlights Dialectic of Enlightenment's philosophical theses as a residue of enlightenment, which residue, he thinks, escapes the all-encompassing power that this text attributes to a thoroughly functionalized and administered world. Habermas thus holds that the enlightening effect Horkheimer and Adorno's book intends, its rational edge, finds anchorage in the validity-claims it makes, which according to a universal pragmatics of language are susceptible of discursive redemption. If Dialectic of Enlightenment fails rationally to support its critique of instrumental reason, Habermas suggests, this is to be explained by its failure to thematize and to recognize the potential inherent in modernity for communicative rationality. In point of fact, he argues that Dialectic of Enlightenment conceives of reason in terms of a monological relation between subject and object. And if Dialectic of Enlightenment thinks the history of subjectivity as the progressive reification of the self, the communicative, intersubjective constitution of the modern subject,

according to Habermas, cannot be explained. Dialectic of Enlightenment, read along the lines of Habermas's critique, treats of self-consciousness as **exhaustively** molded by civilization's instrumental intervention upon nature; views the process of civilization as consolidating the social division of labor; and in contradistinction to the analyses of Marx and Hegel advances the idea that civilization **irrevocably** consists in the compulsive domination of nature and in the mastery of the majority of humans by a minority. For Habermas such a diagnosis fails to capture communicative practices rooted in the lifeworld, which evade instrumentalization, point in the direction of a rational consensus and are constitutive of an autonomous ego.

Yet if it is indeed the case, as Habermas holds, that Dialectic of Enlightenment situates reason in a monological subject, and hence that it cannot rationally ground by means of a universal pragmatics of language the validity-claims it raises against instrumental rationality, his assertion that Dialectic of Enlightenment is implicated in a performative contradiction is incoherent: Dialectic of Enlightenment's putative erasure of the distinction between domination and reason, which reason Habermas claims it understands in **monological** terms, could not contradict **performatively** its presumed **communicative-rational**, that is, discursively-redeemable mobilization of validity-claims. Habermas's category 'performative contradiction' could only make sense in the context of his discussion of Dialectic of

Enlightenment if he had established that Horkheimer and Adorno's work employs the very rationality that it presumably undermines. But, on the one hand, Habermas constructs his critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment by claiming to have located the latter's rational reservoir in its discursively testable claims to validity. Dialectic of Enlightenment would thus be rational in the sense of 'rational' Habermas espouses in his pragmatics of language. To be sure, he argues that Adorno and Horkheimer remain oblivious of this sense of 'rational'. On the other hand, Habermas reads Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of instrumental reason as if it were caught up in the philosophy of consciousness's understanding of reason. As I argue in my fourth chapter, Habermas thereby means that Dialectic of Enlightenment understands reason as the instrumental activity of a cognizing subject that purports to legislate truth and meaning in monological fashion. Even if the critique of instrumental reason were totalizing, as Habermas maintains, it would be entangled in a **performative** contradiction only if the rationality that he takes in the end to evade instrumentalization were the monological rationality posited by the philosophy of consciousness. He maintains, though, that the rationality mobilized by Dialectic of Enlightenment that does escape the instrumental logic of positivistic science and technology is to be understood as lying outside the framework of the philosophy of consciousness, that is to say, as comprehensible solely

in terms of the paradigm of linguistic intersubjectivity. Habermas's argument that Dialectic of Enlightenment is mired in a performative contradiction blindly oscillates between what he sees as Adorno and Horkheimer's obsolete perspective on reason and the discursive rationality that, in tune with his own theoretical approach, which understands itself to be at the cutting edge of enlightenment thinking, he ascribes to their normative and cognitive claims. This oscillation remains unmediated in his texts critical of Dialectic of Enlightenment, and hence it subverts behind the scenes the attempt by these texts to position themselves against their object as heralds of a triumphant, reflexive, enlightening theory of communicative action.

Habermas's discussion of Dialectic of Enlightenment vacillates unawares between a historicist treatment of its object and a critique from the standpoint of a communicative rationality with universalist aspirations. He argues that Horkheimer and Adorno, in thematizing the self-destruction of enlightenment rationality, give up hope in the liberating power [loesende Kraft] of reason, but that they nonetheless abide in the "now paradoxical labor of the concept."⁴¹ He avers that "this mood, this attitude or view [Einstellung] is one we no longer share."⁴² If Dialectic of Enlightenment relinquishes the critique of ideology and, in agreement with historicism, is skeptical of reason, Habermas maintains, this is to be explained in the light of the collapse of bourgeois culture and institutions under fascism. Fascism,

in his view, appeared to eviscerate the rational content and normative potential of modernity and hence to remove the ground wherein ideology-critique could find anchorage. Dialectic of Enlightenment, according to Habermas, merely reflects the crumbling of bourgeois culture under fascism, without being able to extricate itself from the ruins. Had Dialectic of Enlightenment problematized its skepticism of reason [Vernunftskepsis] and pondered the ground why such skepticism is untenable, he adds, it would have secured the normative foundations for critical social theory and thus prevented its own participation in the decomposition of bourgeois culture under fascism. In other words, Habermas holds that if Dialectic of Enlightenment would have grounded its own rational intervention by appeal to what he terms 'the validity basis of speech', it would have avoided helplessly mimicking the apparent self-destruction of enlightenment rationality. For Habermas, fascism marks a temporary deviation from social evolution in the direction of universalist law and morality; decentered world-views destructive of the monolithic authority of myth, religion or metaphysics typical of traditional societies; subjective autonomy nourished by communication aimed at consensual agreement; the differentiation of modern cognition into separate spheres of validity, each with its own logic--the spheres, namely, of science, law and morality, and art; and lifeworld resistance to penetration by non-linguistic systemic media--such as money and power--that coordinate

social action. In his retrospective analysis of the circumstances in which Dialectic of Enlightenment was written, Habermas deems the latter's putative mood, attitude and orientation, and its presumed failure to resist the decomposition of bourgeois culture under fascism to be governed by a historical constellation, which he sees as *passé*: Stalinism, the failure of a socialist revolution to materialize in the west, the lack of an autonomous proletarian consciousness and the experience of fascism explain, according to Habermas, Adorno and Horkheimer's negative appraisal of the emancipatory potential of enlightenment theory and bourgeois institutions.

Yet in spite of relativizing Dialectic of Enlightenment in historicist fashion, Habermas also locates in it a reservoir of discursive rationality, which his universal pragmatics of language roots without historical specificity in the intersubjective redeemability of the claims to validity advanced in speech. Habermas criticizes Dialectic of Enlightenment as being oblivious to the reflexivity of its own validity-claims, which claims, he thinks, are thereby left ungrounded. This lack of reflexivity prevents it, he maintains, from rescuing the rationality immanent in critical social theory from dissolution in the face of fascism. This criticism draws Dialectic of Enlightenment into the magnetic field of Habermas's theory of communicative rationality.

In upbraiding Dialectic of Enlightenment for its lack of reflexivity, Habermas's critique communicates with it, so to speak, within the horizon of discursive rationality; in circumscribing elements of Dialectic of Enlightenment within a determinate historical constellation, his analysis extrudes them from the communicative space wherein their validity could be problematized. But in cleaving the textual elements that he understands in historicist fashion from the conceptual terrain where, according to his theory of communication, their validity could be assessed, Habermas violates one of the tenets of this theory, the tenet, namely, that the understanding of speech-acts is inseparable from affirming or denying their validity. Habermas's historicist relativization of Dialectic of Enlightenment's supposed pessimism about the liberating power of enlightenment rationality evades subsumption under the systemic gaze of his ahistorical concept of the validity of speech-acts.

In its dismissal of most of Dialectic of Enlightenment's presentation [Darstellung] as rhetoric, Habermas's discussion pendulates again between rational critique and sympathetic understanding. Habermas abstracts what he takes to be Dialectic of Enlightenment's rhetorical form from what he suggests is the substance of the "thoroughly philosophically **meant** text [der Anspruch des durchaus philosophisch gemeinten Textes]." 43 Habermas conceives of rhetoric as self-referential speech, in the

sense that he does not think it capable of rational thematization aimed at intersubjective agreement. Rhetorical language for Habermas is narcissistic: it merely celebrates itself and thus disobeys the regime of discursive rationality. His critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment tosses out the latter's presumed rhetorical shell and understands itself as a sober assessment of the merits of the two properly philosophic theses it finds in Horkheimer and Adorno's text. This critique draws Dialectic of Enlightenment's presentation into the horizon of the theory of communicative action, and it at once takes a hermeneutical leap in the direction of authorial intention. The discardable rhetorical form leaves intact, according to Habermas, the philosophically **meant** theses.

No doubt, in the 1969 preface to Dialectic of Enlightenment Adorno and Horkheimer intimate that they conceive of their work as a philosophical tract, though what they actually say resists Habermas's simplification: "Our conception of history does not imagine itself to stand outside history, yet it does not positivistically chase after facts [Information]. As a critique of philosophy, it does not wish to relinquish philosophy." 44 A first approach to the previous claim suggests that Horkheimer and Adorno draw upon the earlier critical theory's insistence that philosophy cannot be grasped in abstraction from history, from the social division of labor, indeed, from the conditions of production. Both the early critical theory

and Dialectic of Enlightenment reject conceptions of philosophy that view it as a disembodied, ahistorical activity detached from social processes. Habermas's rather diffuse category of a "thoroughly philosophically meant text" does not do justice to the terms in which Adorno and Horkheimer conceive of the relation between their work and philosophy. Further, Habermas does not lay out criteria for resolving the hermeneutical tension between his sympathetic treatment of Adorno and Horkheimer's supposed philosophical intentions and his silence toward their view that Dialectic of Enlightenment's style cannot be sundered from its substantive claims. In the 1944 preface, they state: "If the public realm finds itself in a condition in which thought turns into a commodity and language into its praise, the attempt to trace this depravity must refuse allegiance to the received linguistic and conceptual standards, lest the world-historical consequences of this depravity overtake any such attempt." 45 Habermas does not explain why he takes authorial intention to be hermeneutically significant in some instances and not in others. And his foray into the terrain of a hermeneutics of authorially determined meaning fails to adhere to the rational strictures that rule his critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment's presentation.

Despite this critique, Habermas himself employs rhetorical language in his discussion of what he takes to be Dialectic of Enlightenment's position with respect to modernity. As I will argue shortly, Habermas's rhetorical

language is incongruent with the language of his critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment's picture of modernity, a critique which is carried out from the standpoint of his notion of communicative rationality.

In spite of the occasional Rankean detours, Habermas criticizes what he sees as Dialectic of Enlightenment's diagnosis of modernity. Habermas argues that Dialectic of Enlightenment does not do justice to the cultural content of modernity, for, in his view, it fails to register modernity's differentiation into separate spheres of validity. Following Max Weber, Habermas understands modernity as compartmentalized into the realms of science, law and morality, and art. According to Habermas, each realm is governed by its own principles of validation. Dialectic of Enlightenment, Habermas argues, thus ignores the potential for communicative understanding inherent in the process of the rationalization of world-views away from the closed cosmogonic-mythical conception of the world typical of traditional societies. Such a conception, he maintains, did not distinguish between nature and culture, and it conflated sign, meaning and referent. Enlightenment, for Habermas, explicitly maps out the bounds of the external world, intersubjectivity and inner nature. Insofar as for Habermas the progress of enlightenment in the course of modernization issues in the three distinct spheres of validity just mentioned, it paves the way toward an admittedly counterfactually construed ideal speech situation

in which rational speakers would achieve clarity about theoretical matters, practical aims, and aesthetically nurtured and interpreted inner needs. According to Habermas, the communicative structures immanent in the lifeworld, which in his view holds out the promise of distortion-free communication, facilitate access to the reflexive problematization of modern culture, which access is blocked under the mythological conflation of nature and culture. Dialectic of Enlightenment's thesis that myth and enlightenment are entwined is at odds with Habermas's belief in the enlightening effect of the cultural differentiation of modernity. He conceives of Dialectic of Enlightenment as immobilizing modern science and technology, morality and law, and art, under the sign of the mythological force of instrumental reason.

Yet rhetorical figures creep into Habermas's critique of what he characterizes as Adorno and Horkheimer's account of modernity. Habermas rhetorically and adventitiously reads into Dialectic of Enlightenment attitudes and moods. Such attitudes and moods, that is to say, are not articulated in Dialectic of Enlightenment. I would have thought that the linguistic turn in philosophy, which Habermas does take, is incompatible with the translation of propositions into unstated feelings. In his interpretation of Dialectic of Enlightenment, Habermas practices distortion-free communication in reverse. From Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that Nietzsche and Sade correctly see a

formal, subjective, instrumental rationality as not standing closer to morality than to immorality, Habermas derives the conclusion that their analysis **sarcastically** agrees with ethical skepticism.⁴⁶ Furthermore, he attributes to Dialectic of Enlightenment, in connection with its critique of the culture industry, "**powerless rage** over the ironic rightness [Gerechtigkeit] of the presumably non-revisable judgment that mass culture crystallizes around an art that was always ideological."⁴⁷

But if the authors of Dialectic of Enlightenment had indeed been rendered **powerless** by rage over the commodification of bourgeois culture, the chapter on the culture industry would not have come into existence. On the other hand, if the chapter were expressive of powerless rage--be that as it may--its effect upon Habermas, who was obviously mobilized by it into publishing a rejoinder, would remain a mystery. Habermas, the linguistic turn shepherd who claims to lead critical social theory away from mentalistic pastures in the direction of communicative intersubjectivity, seems to hear diabolical laughter and mad ravings, in tune with what appears to be a veritable private language of his, upon coming into contact with some passages in Dialectic of Enlightenment. Though he patriarchally dismisses its presentation as being rhetorical, and hence as lying outside the bounds of discursive rationality, as if Dialectic of Enlightenment's claim that its form and content are interwoven were not worthy of dialogical interpretation,

Habermas's own critique exits discursive space when it tries to transubstantiate Horkheimer and Adorno's theses on morality and culture into moods.

In a similar vein, Habermas characterizes Dialectic of Enlightenment's defense of the practice of determinate negation as if it were a kind of conjuration. He maintains that Dialectic of Enlightenment shares with Nietzsche's work the radicalization of the critique of ideology. Yet, he argues, whereas Nietzsche embraces the consequence of such a radicalization--namely, the dissolution of reason--and resorts to the aestheticist glorification of the will to power, Horkheimer and Adorno, exercise determinate negation in ad hoc fashion. For Habermas, the critique of instrumental reason mobilizes the critique of ideology against reason itself--insofar as it collapses the distinction between power and rational validity--and thereby renounces theory. Although he does not elucidate at this juncture his sense of 'theory', he undoubtedly means a reflexive system that recognizes the possibility of discursively grounding its validity claims. Habermas sees in determinate negation a useless remnant of the debris supposedly left by what he takes to be Dialectic of Enlightenment's self-destructive account of the operationalization of reason.

Yet the very passage, which Habermas quotes, where Horkheimer and Adorno thematize determinate negation expressly points to a dialectical language that they think

is the vehicle, so to speak, of determinate negation. The conception of such a language inherent in Adorno and Horkheimer's discussion bears no obvious resemblance to magical incantations. They write:

Dialectics...reveals every image as script. It reads in the image's features the confession of falsity. In extracting this confession, dialectics disempowers the image and commits itself to truth. Language is therefore more than a mere system of signs. With the concept of determinate negation, Hegel stressed an element of enlightenment that distinguishes it from the positivist disintegration he imputed to it.⁴⁸

I would suggest the following interpretation of the previous passage. Dialectic of Enlightenment reads the proscription by Jewish religion against false representations of God--that is, against idolatry--and against naming God in vain as a progressive enlightenment step, for, on Horkheimer and Adorno's theory, this proscription is destructive of specious harmonies between facticity and any notions of what would transcend it. They secularize the prohibition on graven images and on the misuse of God's name by refusing to depict a just society. In their view, premature, artificial anticipations of a social order free from domination enfeeble the critique of present conditions, and they are hence corrosive of truth. Dialectic of Enlightenment conceives of positivist science as an image, a photographic reproduction, as it were, of advanced capitalist society. Adorno and Horkheimer characterize the process of enlightenment, which they believe issues in the establishment of a hegemonizing

positivist rationality, as the progressive abstraction of the cognizing subject from the material world. This process, in their view, renders the external world devoid of meaning and, therefore, susceptible to unbridled instrumental manipulation. They maintain that the mathematization of knowledge under the aegis of positivism mirrors the abstractness of a nature subjected to industrial domination and of capitalist social relations governed by exchange value. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, positivist thought merely pictures facticity, as it were; such thought verifies without spanning any critical distance what is already extant. A dialectical language that "is more than a mere system of signs," Horkheimer and Adorno suggest, problematizes the harmonious relation, the congruency assumed by positivism between a formalistic scientific knowledge and external nature. To the extent that they view such a problematization in terms of determinate negation, they reject abstract, global dismissals of science and industrialism.⁴⁹

Positivist science's inability to grasp by means of its own categorial apparatus its location and role within the social division of labor is for Adorno and Horkheimer an index of the falsity of its image of reality. Dialectic of Enlightenment understands itself as transcending positivism's petrified, formalist, abstract categorial framework by examining the development of enlightenment knowledge within the context of the process of civilization.

The positivist registration of facts, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, is oblivious of the price exacted by enlightenment progress, that is, of the objectification of the self, the senselessness of production for the sake of production, the fracturing of society under the aegis of domination, capitalist exploitation, the commodification of culture, and the release of genocidal violence. It would be platitudinous to point out that Horkheimer and Adorno's dialectical critique of positivism relies upon conceptual and linguistic means, were it not for Habermas's peculiar attempt at converting the language of determinate negation into some sort of chant typical, perhaps, of magical rites. Habermas catapults determinate negation from the space of discursive rationality by characterizing it as if it were like a conjuration. Paradoxically, he also domesticates the alien spirits with which he associates Adorno and Horkheimer's dialectics precisely by articulating determinate negation's supposed abandonment of theory. His critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment fails to clarify the basis upon which it can decode textual material that it itself has declared to lie outside the realm of discourse.

Habermas's discussion of Dialectic of Enlightenment fails to acknowledge its own deviation from the systematic tenets that inform the notion of communicative rationality. To be sure, Habermas does not exempt his own discourse from his distinction between genesis and validity⁵⁰. His theory

of communicative action understands itself as a contribution toward ideal speech, not as the instantiation of such speech. The empirical circumstances in which his discourse lays out the ideal speech situation, that is, this discourse's institutional conditions of possibility, the polemics that inform it, the professional jealousies that attach to it, its inconsistencies, obscurities and contradictions, do not vitiate--Habermas suggests--the validity of the concept and practice it advocates, the validity, namely, of communicative rationality. This is so because validity for Habermas can ultimately be established only under ideal discursive conditions. From the standpoint of Habermas's consensus theory of truth, the truth of his critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment could only be ascertained in the course of universal rational deliberation. But it remains a desideratum of Habermas's theory of communicative action to establish, rather than merely assuming, a connection between the modern lifeworld and pro-enlightenment discourses, on the one hand, and the concept of the ideal speech situation, on the other. In other words, that such modern bourgeois institutions as the family, the mass media, parliamentary democracy, Habermas's philosophy, a decentered subjectivity, a desacralized social sphere, and so forth, might **point in the direction of** communication aimed at consensus--and Habermas thinks that they do--does not by any means settle the question whether the practices that append to these institutions are indeed

conducive to the instantiation of communicative rationality. That question might very well not be answerable a priori. But in any event, Habermas's analysis leaves open the possibility that the practices and institutions he thinks anticipatory of ideal speech could postpone, perhaps indefinitely, the attainment of his cherished goal.

(Claus Offe's work on the separation between form and content in liberal democracy suggests that raising such a possibility is not idle speculation.⁵¹ According to Offe, welfare-state liberalism conceives of society and the state as connected by a bidirectional informational bridge. That this conception is today ideological, Offe argues, becomes clear as soon as one reflects upon the state's glorification of and dependence on so-called experts, its practice of behind-the-scenes decision making, and the thoroughly undemocratic character of a politics governed by influence-peddling. Further, Offe points to the extraparliamentary forms of opposition during the late 1960s in the Federal Republic of Germany as another indication of the cleft between society and the state.)

Further, Habermas's defense of the so-called rational potential of modernity does not preclude the possibility that revolutionary change might be better than the melioristic practices he seems to detect in parliamentary government as a means to bring about the consensual politics he glorifies. The point of invoking these possibilities is not abstractly to attempt to lay out the best praxis toward

a communicative utopia. The point, rather, is to highlight the lack of fit between Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment, which critique understands itself as sharply contrasting with its object in its support of communicative enlightenment, and the counterfactual concept of the ideal speech situation. Obviously, the defense of modernity inherent in that critique does not suffice to bring about the establishment of communicative rationality, and the critique does not systematically respect the ideal speech regime to which it pledges allegiance. Habermas, nonetheless, reads Dialectic of Enlightenment as if he were apprised of the outcome of a procedurally and counterfactually construed universal discourse about the rationality of Adorno and Horkheimer's work. The polemical force with which Habermas seeks to relegate Dialectic of Enlightenment to the fringes of rationality cannot conceal the fact that the connection between his critique of Horkheimer and Adorno and the realization of the ideal of consensual discourse is not necessary. Insofar as Habermas's ideal speech situation remains at best a distant aim to be fulfilled in the course of enlightenment progress, which course cannot soberly be mapped out in advance, his supposedly pro-enlightenment critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment cannot but be adventitiously linked to such an aim. Nor is Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment fully congruent with the presuppositions of distortion-free communication.

The unmediated opposition between the fragments in Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment that conflict with the notion of rational critique (a notion that originates in his universal pragmatics of language), on the one hand, and the systematizing scope he ascribes to his theory of discursive consensus, on the other hand, is analogous to the contradiction thematized in Dialectic of Enlightenment between an abstract, subject-centered, systematic instrumental reason, and the residues it fails to assimilate. Dialectic of Enlightenment argues that the species' struggle for self-preservation governs the civilizational attempt at controlling external nature, and that the dominant contemporary form of enlightenment--namely, instrumental rationality--seeks to render in systematic fashion its environment, society and inner nature fully manipulable, calculable, determinable. Dialectic of Enlightenment, pace Habermas, does not maintain that instrumental rationality colonizes the whole industrial world. Horkheimer and Adorno understand their own intervention as a reflection upon the course of enlightenment rationality and thus as eluding instrumentalization. Further, Dialectic of Enlightenment already locates in what Adorno's Aesthetic Theory terms 'autonomous works of art' formal principles of construction that subvert the instrumental logic Dialectic of Enlightenment imputes to discursive rationality. Such art works, according to both texts, give expression to the

fissures, the dissonances of a society under the aegis of abstract economic, political and cultural forces.

Autonomous art works, on this theory, are not ruled by the systemic imperatives of a reason bent on self-preservation, nor do they view society as if it were a harmonious functional whole.

Yet whereas Dialectic of Enlightenment conceives of the fracturing of society as a necessary consequence of the operation of the dominant ratio, an analogous linguistic mechanism that would account for the failure of Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment to crystallize around the systematic tenets of his universal pragmatics is not all that visible. Perhaps such a mechanism is to be found in Adorno's Negative Dialectics, which offers a philosophical explanation for the lack of fit between conceptual systems and what they in spite of themselves fail to absorb, an explanation it gives in terms of an incongruency inherent in the history of enlightenment thought between subject and object, language and world, idea and reality. To the extent that Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment leaves as abstractly related opposites the systemic imperative toward rational critique and the textual splinters rebelling against the system, it lags behind the conceptual level achieved by its object's problematization of the aporias of systematizing thought. In the fourth chapter, I sharpen the previous point by arguing that

Habermas falsely assumes the notion of reflexive grounding to be already intelligible within his theoretical system.

CHAPTER 3

ADORNO'S ELABORATION OF DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT: TOWARD AN UNREGIMENTED SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF NATURE

In the first chapter, I argue that Juergen Habermas misreads Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment as if it conceived of reason reductively. Whereas Habermas maintains that Dialectic of Enlightenment universalizes instrumental reason and that it is thus guilty of a performative contradiction, I contend that Adorno and Horkheimer grasp enlightenment rationality as a historically differentiated process. To be sure, they claim that since its inception in Homeric myth the process of enlightenment has had an abiding attribute, that it has been governed throughout by the separation between the cognizing subject and the material world. Adorno and Horkheimer distinguish enlightenment reason, which they locate in an abstractive subjectivity, from mimetic interaction with nature. In Dialectic of Enlightenment, mimetic interaction between humans and nature is situated, albeit vaguely, in an archaic time marked successively by preanimistic, animistic and magical practices, and it is taken to be suggestive of a utopian condition in which human beings would relate to nature and among themselves without coercion. Horkheimer and Adorno trace the roots of the domineering subjectivity they think becomes prevalent with the forward march of enlightenment back to a historical time (which they intimate is documented in Homer's Odyssey) in which the self begins to consolidate itself as distinct from nature. They argue

that the emerging self experiences the external world as a threat, and that it aggressively renounces sensorial satisfaction to preserve itself.

Yet Adorno and Horkheimer do not treat of enlightenment reason reductively as if it were merely an instrument of self-preservation. They suggest that instrumental rationality becomes dominant in the course of the formation of the subject, but that it does not thereby eliminate the possibility of an alternative form of reason or of a social formation free of domination. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, if it is true of instrumental reason that it is blind to its own direction and to human ends, there nonetheless remains a form of enlightenment rationality capable of critical reflection upon the effects of instrumental thought and action. Horkheimer and Adorno hold that the abstractive process through which the subject comes to constitute itself as a monadic force destructive of instinctual fulfillment and external nature and productive of societal fractures also makes possible the emergence of a critical rationality not functionalized in the service of self-preservation. Dialectic of Enlightenment instantiates and defends a critical enlightenment that claims to historicize instrumental reason. That is, Dialectic of Enlightenment seeks to shatter the positivist myth that mathematized science is the paragon of knowledge, and that it is indispensable for social progress. Dialectic of Enlightenment contains the kernel of an idea developed by

Adorno in Aesthetic Theory, the idea namely that the autonomous art of the bourgeois era is the locus of an aesthetic subjectivity that experiences and cognizes the material world in noninstrumental fashion. Later in the present chapter, I will elaborate the previous claim in the context of my discussion of Adorno's development in Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory of Dialectic of Enlightenment's theory of the formation of the self.

In the second chapter, I subject Habermas's discussion of Dialectic of Enlightenment to an immanent critique. That is, I ask whether Habermas is correct in assuming that his critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment is unlike its object in that it is capable of being reflexively justified. According to Habermas, his version of critical social theory is reflexive, for it recognizes that the ideal speech situation is the communicative condition in which its truth could be decided upon. Habermas maintains that, in contrast to his theory of communicative action, Dialectic of Enlightenment remains oblivious to its own discursiveness, to the fact that it raises discursively testable claims to validity. He holds that Horkheimer and Adorno criticize reason in totalizing fashion as being inextricably entwined with domination, and that they thereby undermine their own noninstrumental theory. According to Habermas's formal pragmatics of language, the claims to rational validity Dialectic of Enlightenment raises are susceptible of

discursive problematization. Yet, Habermas avers, because Dialectic of Enlightenment remains imprisoned within an epistemology predicated on the interaction between a monological subject (which subject, he thinks, is sundered from the communicative contexts in which it is formed) and the objective world, it is incapable of establishing the conditions of its own truth. For Habermas, such conditions can only be given in intersubjective communication devoid of coercion. That is, he thinks that they can only be given in communication that would not be encumbered by any of the following: strategic manipulation; psychological disturbances; systemic media for the coordination of social action (namely, power and money); unproblematized traditional values; or pre-modern, cosmogonic-mythical forms of knowledge and action.

My discussion of Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment advances the view that his concept of communicative rationality fails to support the said critique. Habermas counterfactually construes communicative rationality as a discursive procedure that would make consensus about theoretical, practical and aesthetic matters possible. I think, though, that a prospective allusion to distortion-free communication, which allusion is not the outcome of consensual discourse, does not sustain the apodictic force with which Habermas concludes that Dialectic of Enlightenment is irreflexive, that it dispenses with the means rationally to justify itself. Embedded in Habermas's

defense of a procedural rationality he thinks would produce intersubjective consensus is a difficulty that calls into question the cogency of his notion of reflexive grounding. The difficulty I have in mind is that within the framework of his theory the truth of the said defense could only be understood as the result of discursive deliberation. Quite clearly, such discursive deliberation awaits practical realization. Habermas retrospectively criticizes Dialectic of Enlightenment as a self-destructive critique of instrumental reason and as being oblivious to the traces of communicative rationality immanent within it; yet his discussion of Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of enlightenment rationality cannot clarify, for Habermasian reasons, its prospects for being understood and endorsed by participants in the so-called ideal-speech situation. The charge of lack of reflexivity that Habermas levels at Dialectic of Enlightenment is a projection of the failure of his polemic against Adorno and Horkheimer to establish a necessary connection between the theory of distortion-free communication (on which the said polemic rests) and the counterfactually conceived ideal-speech practice.

Habermas all too prematurely dismisses Dialectic of Enlightenment as being incapable of contributing to noncoercive communication. In claiming that Adorno and Horkheimer globalize instrumental reason, he mistakenly congeals their discussion of the process of enlightenment.

(Later in the chapter, I will argue that Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory develop Dialectic of Enlightenment's historically differentiated account of language and reason, which account Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment fails to thematize.) Habermas understands his universal pragmatics of language as the rationalization of communicative competence, and it is in this light that he imposes hermeneutic closure on Dialectic of Enlightenment. Although Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory most certainly do not espouse the proceduralist regimentation of communication advocated by Habermas, they do elaborate Dialectic of Enlightenment's critique of rigidified thought and language. In the course of the present chapter, I will develop the idea that the said critique opens up the space for Adorno's concept of an unregimented subjectivity, which subjectivity he takes to be a necessary condition for a society (indeed, for a form of communication) devoid of domination.

According to Habermas, all speech-acts are understandable, and their understandability is one of properties that attests to their anticipation of communicative rationality. Purporting to locate the transcendental ground for an uncoerced intersubjective understanding, he abstracts from the diversity of linguistic formations. Habermas poses the question, how is such understanding possible? His answer is that every competent speaker, in engaging upon speech acts, raises discursively

redeemable claims to validity. To be sure, Habermas does not conceive in totally ahistorical fashion of the potential for communicative rationality he thinks is implicit in speech-acts. Unlike John Rawls's A Theory of Justice, Habermas's concept of ideal speech does not presuppose the so-called original position, that is, it does not presuppose deliberation behind a veil of ignorance about human history, the social division of labor, power, and so forth. For Habermas, as I argue in the previous chapter, the ideal speech situation is thinkable only within the framework of modernity. Habermas historicizes both his idea of communicative rationality and his critique of Adorno and Horkheimer by arguing that they are constitutive of a program to further enlightenment (to advance "the project of modernity") in the direction of consensual knowledge and action. Yet he dehistoricizes his notion of the rationalization of communicative competence by claiming that all speech-acts are capable of being understood and critically evaluated from the standpoint of an admittedly stylized ideal speech situation that awaits historical crystallization. Habermas interprets modernity as the historical condition of possibility of intersubjective consensus. But, he avers, the genetic dependency of distortion-free communication upon modernity does not at all relativize the universal validity of the idea of communicative rationality.

Habermas purchases the rationalization of communicative competence at a hefty price: his theory of communicative action robs language of its historicity. He scrutinizes all language according to whether its claims to validity are discursively redeemable. As if he were the spokesman for all rational participants in ideal speech deliberations, Habermas proclaims that poetry and rhetoric are self-referential, that is, that they are incapable of being discursively examined regarding their cognitive, moral and aesthetic validity. Speech-acts, on the other hand, are for him inherently rational. But just as Kant's transcendental inquiry into the conditions of possibility of synthetic judgments a priori takes Newtonian physics as a given,⁵² Habermas's investigation into the conditions of possibility of intersubjective consensus hypostatizes a linguistic competence rationally reconstructed as the capacity to engage in discursively testable speech-acts. Habermas's formal pragmatics of language is positivistic with respect to the rational potential he ascribes to speech-acts.

Habermas forcibly packages Dialectic of Enlightenment as being incompatible with communicative enlightenment. In his view, most of Dialectic of Enlightenment is rhetorical, and hence it stands outside the matrix of what he takes to be rational discussion. He does maintain, to be sure, that Adorno and Horkheimer advance two philosophical theses: myth already contains elements of enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology. According to Habermas,

though, not only do these theses threaten to convict enlightenment of being inextricably bound to practices of domination and of failing to bring to light its entanglement with such practices, but furthermore the said theses border on self-destruction. If it were indeed the case that enlightenment thought is ineluctably tied to power, Habermas reasons, Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of instrumental reason would lack the normative distance it claims to span with respect to its object.

As I point out in the first chapter, I take Habermas's argument to miss the differentiated character of the concept of enlightenment unfolded in Dialectic of Enlightenment. The latter text thematizes the historicity of language and reason, and it does not reduce enlightenment to instrumental thought. No doubt, it does view such thought as having become progressively more dominant in the course of civilization. Yet Adorno and Horkheimer do not explain how the abstractive cognizing subject that they think is at the root of enlightenment reason is still capable of subverting instrumentalization. In Dialectic of Enlightenment, they merely allude to a self that would harmoniously orient itself toward nature and society. If there is an element of truth in Habermas's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment, it is that Horkheimer and Adorno do not offer a constructive theory of a non-rigidified consciousness.

Dialectic of Enlightenment develops a theory of the reification of consciousness. For Horkheimer and Adorno,

the reification of consciousness is a condition of possibility of fascism, Stalinism, the culture industry and bourgeois morality, and it is reproduced by them. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, theoretical edifices--from Greek metaphysics to positivist formalism--that systematically exclude as non-scientific the particular, the incommensurable, the qualitatively distinct, are the conceptual expression of the human drive toward self-preservation. That is, they are taken by Adorno and Horkheimer to express at the conceptual level the subjective domination of nature.

But Dialectic of Enlightenment proceeds according to the early Frankfurt School's notion of theory as immanent critique, which means that its theory of the formation of an autocratic subjective reason does not completely jettison the conceptual resources of an enlightenment it characterizes as abstractive. Dialectic of Enlightenment does not place itself fully outside the framework of its object. Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that Dialectic of Enlightenment too is an effect of the division between mental and manual labor, theory and praxis, mind and body, a division that they argue is the result of the enlightenment repression of use-values, instinctual fulfillment and the diversity inherent in nature. For Dialectic of Enlightenment, modern enlightenment rationality remains imprisoned within a field of forces that encompasses systematizing theory, the prevalence of exchange-value,

routinized and menial labor, and an unbridled economy and technology divorced from the human need for a society devoid of coercion. Dialectic of Enlightenment retains a philosophical language that abides by both the social and the academic divisions of labor. It treats of its object, the process of enlightenment, conceptually, that is, in abstractive fashion. If it succeeds in relativizing what by its own lights is the autarchy of the cognizing subject, who unavoidably experiences the material world abstractively, it is in its fragmentary and paratactic structure. Adorno and Horkheimer give up the pretense to systematic coherence that they attribute to the monadic, instrumental-rational subject. Dialectic of Enlightenment, though, does not explicitly offer a justification for its stylistic dissolution of systematic thought.

Dialectic of Enlightenment's textual layout subverts what for Horkheimer and Adorno is the predominant form of enlightenment. It subverts, namely, the mode of cognition of a systematizing, logically circumscribed, and yet colonialistic subjectivity. Dialectic of Enlightenment is not unified under the signature of systematic coherence. Although Habermas erroneously claims that Dialectic of Enlightenment is self-refuting, he correctly suggests that Adorno and Horkheimer leave their argumentative strategy largely unproblematicized.

Adorno's Negative Dialectics aims to overcome the deficit: it offers a theory of the abstractive force of enlightenment rationality. According to Negative Dialectics, there is a non-erasable difference between subjective conceptualization and its object.⁵³ For Adorno, the ideal that thought must exhaustively grasp being is expressive (as Dialectic of Enlightenment already claims) of an imperious subjectivity bent on mastering its environment. Adorno maintains that the imperious cognizing subject seeks to cancel its difference from, its lack of identity with its object. In Negative Dialectics, he holds that the tendency toward the mathematization of nature and formalization of reason--a tendency that Dialectic of Enlightenment, in agreement with Edmund Husserl's Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, ascribes to the Western process of rationalization⁵⁴--has the effect of robbing objects of their differential qualities, that is, of those properties of theirs that are not susceptible of scientific standardization. Adorno argues that the quantification of nature is the projection of a reified subjectivity coercively unified to preserve itself against external threats and dissolution in sensorial bliss. For Adorno, the necessary lack of fit between concept and object is made manifest by the contrast between the fixity of conceptual forms, which aim to unify a manifold of particulars, and the historicity and complexity of their objects.⁵⁵

Adorno illustrates the previous point in his discussion of Max Weber's account of the concept of capitalism,⁵⁶ an account which can be found in Economy and Society. Adorno argues that Weber correctly criticizes subjectivist interpretations of capitalism that center on acquisitiveness and the profit motive as merely registering surface phenomena. Adorno then points out that for Weber the profit motive cannot be understood in abstraction from the need to estimate rentability, that is, in abstraction from a calculating economic rationality. Further, Adorno maintains that Weber sees the departmentalization of work, household and managerial office, as a necessary ingredient of capitalism, and that, in addition, Weber interprets capitalism as requiring a rationalized system of law. Indeed, in his discussion of the the bureaucratization of modernity, Weber views the capitalist firm as closely exemplifying the bureaucratic principle. According to Weber, the capitalist firm approximates in its commitment to the maximization of efficiency the bureaucratic ideal type. Weber asserts that the capitalist firm requires speed, the functionalization of roles, hierarchical discipline, meritocratic remuneration, and so forth.

Yet Adorno criticizes Weber for failing to note that the instrumental rationality of commodity exchange reproduces itself in and through capitalist relations of production, that is, in and through the capitalist division of labor. According to Adorno, capitalist bureaucratic

rationality is, in the substantive sense of reason, irrational, for it blindly preserves and reproduces societal fractures, immiseration in the midst of material plenty, and a heteronomous, passive, fragmented, and manipulable Humean self. In short, for Adorno, the rationality Weber imputes to capitalist bureaucratization is the mark of an irrational society that lies under the spell of domination.

Nonetheless Weber's characterization of capitalism has the merit of evading hypostatizing definitions, which cannot but fail to do justice to the historicity and complexity of capitalism, Adorno contends. For Adorno, as for the early Frankfurt School, the critique of the reification of consciousness has as its object the progressive bureaucratization of society. (Frederick Pollock's account of state capitalism distinguishes between liberal and politicized, administered capitalism.)⁵⁷ Neither monadic, congealed categories nor logically circumscribed definitions suffice, according to Adorno, to grasp the historicity and multifaceted nature of objects.

According to Adorno, concepts distort the identity of their objects by subsuming them under a monistic form that excises their differential qualities.⁵⁸ Further, the enlightenment cognitive ideal of systematic completeness--which ideal is inherent in Kant's notion of reason, Hegel's idea of the absolute spirit, Leibniz' concept of mathesis universalis, Spinoza's axiomatized ethics and the

positivistic subsumption of protocol statements under universalizing principles--is inadequate to the contemporary, fissured social world, Adorno suggests.⁵⁹ On this theory, linguistic constellations of paratactically assembled sentences offer an antidote to the mode of cognition of the monadic enlightenment subject, which projectively freezes its object as if it were a non-contradictory and immutable whole.⁶⁰ Adorno claims that his idea of linguistic constellations is not obtained epistemologically. He argues that it is instead a response to the integrative force of an irrational social order held together by the rule of exchange-value, and that its aim is to understand the said force and the fractures it produces. For Adorno, that conceptualization fails to achieve a perfect fit with its object is not a justification for arbitrary thought. Linguistic constellations, he suggests, are conditioned by the density and increasing consolidation of modern society. They seek to grasp social phenomena in their historicity and contradictoriness, Adorno asserts.

The first essay in Dialectic of Enlightenment instantiates Adorno's notion of linguistic constellations. Enlightenment there is not given a peremptory, monolithic definition. In that essay, Horkheimer and Adorno unfold a concept of enlightenment that calls into question the categorial autonomy with which many a modern philosopher have invested subjective reason. Indeed Cartesian introspection, the Kantian transcendental unity of

apperception and the Fichtean absolute ego purport to isolate reason from social, economic and somatic effects. And, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment, even Hegel's notion of spirit (though it is sustained by a philosophy that claims to rescue concretion from the rubble left by Kant's agnosticism with respect to the possibility of knowledge of things in themselves)⁶¹ functions within a clearly demarcated logical space. For Adorno and Horkheimer, reason cannot be analytically sundered from the sensorial repression it brings about; nor can it be disentangled from a social domination maintained in and through the functionalization of work and the unequal exchange of equivalents. Yet, as I point out above, they do not take enlightenment to be reducible to domination and power. They argue that in the course of the civilizational domination of nature the capacity for critical reflection is not wholly extinguished.

In short, the first essay in Dialectic of Enlightenment treats of enlightenment reason as a contradictory and historically differentiated process. I think the said essay is best read as an Adornian linguistic constellation. On the view advanced in Negative Dialectics, if theory proceeds on the assumption that it must be harmonious, systematic and expressive of eternal essences, the dynamic and intrinsically contradictory character of enlightenment rationality can no longer be grasped.

Adorno's constellatory writing seems to me to be a response to what Dialectic of Enlightenment characterizes as enlightenment's nominalistic tendency.⁶² As I point out in the first chapter, the process of enlightenment for Horkheimer and Adorno is marked by reason's progressive distancing from the material world. They think that in the course of the development of enlightenment thought human beings progressively lose all affinity with nature. On this theory, enlightenment reason jettisons the mimetic relation to nature that informed preanimistic, animistic and magical practices. Adorno and Horkheimer do not paper over the violence inherent in such practices, but they do see in pre-enlightenment mimesis a key to a possible noninstrumental knowledge and experience of nature. (Later in the present chapter and in the fourth chapter, I will dwell on the view advanced in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory that aesthetic experience is noninstrumental and mimetic.) Adorno and Horkheimer think that the process of enlightenment leads to the desubstantialization of concepts and theories, and that this process issues ultimately in formalist thought. On their reading of Homer's Odyssey, Odysseus is the prototypical nominalist, for he empties the name 'Udeis' (which means 'nobody') of its content in order to get Polyphemos to fool his friends into thinking that nobody attacked him. For Dialectic of Enlightenment, the modern tendency toward the disintegration of religion and metaphysics, a tendency that Max Weber interprets in his

theory of modernization as the progressive loss of meaning, attests to the prevalence of a form of thinking structured around nominalistic signs. In Negative Dialectics, Adorno says of linguistic constellations that they aim to overcome the arbitrariness of the relation between concept and object, which arbitrariness he thinks is inherent in a nominalistic enlightenment.

Negative Dialectics thematizes what it calls 'unreflected nominalism'.⁶³ Adorno maintains that unreflected nominalism celebrates the dematerialization of thinking, and that it takes such dematerialization to be irrevocable. Kantian idealism; the Saussurean decoupling of signifier and signified; Rorty's neo-pragmatist stylization of ideas as contingent tools that might or might not work for the purpose at hand (in Rorty's case, the purpose is to defend liberalism's understanding of freedom); and the consensus theory of truth in its Habermasian version: these positions recoil from the attempt at adjudicating the truth or, in the case of neo-pragmatism, the plausibility of theory in terms of the question whether thought or language adequately represent external reality. I interpret these positions as illustrative of Adorno's notion of unreflected nominalism. For Adorno, the somatic, historical, economic, psychological, social, cultural and political tributaries of language and reason cannot be conjured away. Adorno claims that theories that short-circuit their connections with social reality unreflectively ratify enlightenment's

dominant tendency toward subjectivist involution. In his discussion of relativism in Negative Dialectics, Adorno argues that sociological relativism, in uncritically registering a multiplicity of ideologies and perspectives, remains oblivious to the fact that such perspectives and ideologies are the effects of an irrational society, that they are expressive of a bourgeois system of production governed by the private appropriation of profit.⁶⁴ Adorno's insight is that the diverse perspectives, opinions and ideologies, of which the bourgeoisie prides itself reflects social atomization, that is, economically, politically and culturally mandated selfishness. For Adorno, sociological relativism leaves the social conditions of possibility of competing ideologies unproblematized.

Yet Negative Dialectics does not claim to construct a language that captures the material world as it is in itself. In Adorno's view, the subjective mediation of experience cannot be erased. In Negative Dialectics, he carries out an immanent critique of a nominalistic enlightenment. That is to say, Negative Dialectics reflects upon enlightenment's abstractive, subjectivist distortion of objects, without thereby pretending completely to jettison the conceptual resources of a nominalistic language. Adorno, unlike Heidegger, does not concoct a neologistic German in search of a lost immediacy. Adorno extracts from the nominalistic separation between subject and object the elements of his notion of a critical subjectivity. He

argues that the division between intellectual and manual labor, which he suggests is constitutive of economic, political, racial, gender, national and cultural domination in contemporary society, nonetheless makes possible a modicum of autonomy with respect to the expansion of commodification. Such autonomy, for Adorno, provides the space for critical thinking, for a non-reified consciousness.

Adorno maintains that both idealism and materialism are false insofar as they purport to cancel the distinction between subject and object.⁶⁵ In his view, idealism confers primacy to an all-encompassing subjectivity, whereas materialism treats of consciousness as being conditioned by the objective world. Nonetheless, according to Adorno, both materialism and idealism agree in positing one logically prior principle that has the effect of erasing the distinction between subjective cognition and the material world. To be sure, as I will argue below, Adorno does not absolutize the said distinction. Adorno extracts from Hegelian idealism the concept of a subject that confronts congealed thought and reified social institutions negatively, that is, critically. No doubt, Adorno rejects as premature Hegel's affirmation of an absolute spirit that heralds the reconciliation between universal and particular, monarchy and subject, community and individual. With Hegel, Adorno views subjective cognition as inflicting a wound, so to speak, on the objective realm, as detracting from what

materiality is in itself. For Hegel, the understanding leaves the said wound to fester, and he argues that it is the task of speculative reason to heal the wound. Adorno thinks that Hegel imposes unity between subject and object by fiat; in a fragmented society, Adorno avers, harmonizing theory is false. Also false is, in his view, the related glorification of a disembodied, presumably wholly autonomous rationality. Adorno maintains that only linguistic constellations, in their sensitivity to the fractures, manifold qualities and historicity of objects, avoid the bad alternative between a consolidated, monadic subjectivity that projects its coercively forged identity onto the object and the passive, naive-realist acceptance of facticity.

Adorno assumes that, in contradistinction to the predominant enlightenment tendency toward the standardization of the material world, non-hierarchical and non-systematizing assemblages of sentences approximate the unique, contradictory and historical identity of objects. He also assumes that the antinomy immanent in advanced capitalist society between the integrative power of exchange-value and socially produced atomization can only be grasped in constellatory fashion. Leaving aside the question whether these assumptions are correct, he makes, in my view, an important contribution toward demythologizing philosophical discourse. By this I mean to say that for Adorno language and any received canons of reasoning are not immutable or atemporally valid. Adorno's philosophy is

incompatible with the view, widespread in analytic circles, that meaning can be definitionally fixed as if to grasp eternal essences. Adorno opens up the terrain of textual presentation to critical reflection. For him, the grammar of philosophical thought is not carved in stone. He suggests that the assumption that only arguments adhering to logical form are capable of clarity and rationality rests on the reduction of language to a kind of scientific technique. According to Adorno, such a reduction is false, for it robs language of the capacity to express individual suffering.⁶⁶ In opposition to the utilitarian calculus, Adorno thinks that happiness and suffering are not standardizable, quantifiable. He interprets the process of socialization--perhaps 'collectivization' would be more apt--under administrative industrialism as being governed by the societal buffeting and consequent atomization of human beings.

Adorno seeks to give a voice to the fractured self's suffering. On his theory, philosophical edifices founded on putatively universal truths and logically committed to systematicity unreflectively emulate the monopolistic corporatism of modern political, economic and cultural institutions, which stultify the individual. Adorno appends to his reflection upon the social conditions of the linguistic architecture of systematizing thought an exploration into the possible language of a subjectivity

that would not be subjugated by bureaucratic functionalization.

In Die Revidierte Psychoanalyse,⁶⁷ Adorno criticizes Karen Horney's revisionist psychoanalytic theory for undervaluing what in his view is one of Freud's chief contributions, namely the theory of the instincts. Adorno maintains that the revisionist current in psychoanalysis, within which he takes Horney's work to be paradigmatic, posits in harmonizing fashion the concept of a unified character shaped by its social milieu, and that it disregards the consequences of Freud's account of the dynamic of drives for an understanding of modern society. The revisionist current, Adorno says, accuses Freud's theory of conceiving of the ego in abstraction from its social influences. Furthermore, Adorno claims, psychoanalytic revisionism breaks the genetic link between id and ego that Freud posits. (Adorno speaks in several places of the libidinal matrix of the ego.)⁶⁸ The revisionist current's understanding of the self, for Adorno, is liberal: the self, he avers, is viewed there as an organic whole capable of spontaneous and autonomous action in contemporary society. Adorno contends that psychoanalytic revisionism thereby relinquishes Freud's insights that the self is fragmented, and that it is not transparent to itself. According to Adorno, in the name of a sociological turn in psychoanalysis, the revisionist approach becomes oblivious to the fate of the individual who, under the aegis of

civilization's reality principle, is forced sharply to curtail instinctual satisfaction. In Adorno's view, such revisionist categories as 'social influence', 'milieu' and 'family background' are society-affirming in that they retain the liberal departmentalization of individual and society. He adds that the said categories lose the critical force of Freud's insight into the aggressiveness with which libido is displaced and the super-ego constituted. For Adorno, although Freud uncritically distinguishes between psychology and sociology and thereby passively accepts the intellectual division of labor, his admittedly atomizing theory of the dynamics of the instincts provides cognitive and critical access to the social force by means of which individuals are made to conform to reality. In contrast, revisionism's salonfaehig desexualization of Freudian theory, Adorno suggests, passively adopts liberalism's concept of a unified self.

Habermas hypostatizes modern speech-acts as if they were implicitly rational. He claims that Dialectic of Enlightenment congeals its object under the rubric of scientistic thought and language. Dialectic of Enlightenment, he argues, thus fails to grasp the potential for communicative rationality inherent in modern speech. But Habermas loses sight of the historicity Dialectic of Enlightenment ascribes to reason and language. Adorno's Negative Dialectics makes possible an explanation of

Dialectic of Enlightenment's experimental textual arrangement, that is, of its paratactic, fragmentary and constellatory architecture. As I point out above, Dialectic of Enlightenment does not explicitly justify its textual layout. According to Negative Dialectics, the identity of objects is unavoidably deformed by the abstractive, nominalistic subject that comes to predominate in the course of rationalization, the reason being that the said subject projects onto the objects its forcibly consolidated unity. The enlightenment process of subjectivization, for Adorno, leads to the repression of the self's psychosomatic needs. Adorno argues that only a textual structure that refuses artificially and in harmonizing fashion to reach systematic closure can begin to do justice to the complexity, historicity and conflictual nature of objects of knowledge. Negative Dialectics carves out the space for interpreting Dialectic of Enlightenment's textual layout as the fragmentation of the grammar of a rigidified subjectivity. Adorno conceives of constellatory thought as anticipating an unregimented subjective cognition and experience of nature.

In Dialectic of Enlightenment, instrumental rationality is interpreted as blocking subjective reflection. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the culture industry commodifies cultural products, and the reception of art is reduced to mindless applause for oligopolistically controlled mechanisms of economic exchange. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, entertainment and relaxation in a

productivist world are defined in terms of the mechanical execution at work of functionalized tasks. On this view, entertainment and relaxation are essentially the means for mustering enough energy for yet another laboring week. Scientism and a patriarchal super-ego, Adorno and Horkheimer maintain, also militate against the spontaneous, unprogrammed experience of the material world. The widespread torturing of children with the question 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' gives evidence of the imprisonment of experience within functionalistically conceived social roles. Adult life is prepackaged under the signature of aestheticized roles--the above question could easily read, What kind of performer do you want to be in the theater of life?--which roles, both inside and outside Hollywood, are inseparable from the laws of administered exchange-value. Dialectic of Enlightenment retains the romanticist theme that industrialism and the city limit the scope of sensorial experience. (Its clear, though, that Adorno and Horkheimer do not endorse the romanticist embellishment of the bucolic past. On their theory, all romanticizations of the past are escapist and stylize it as if it had eluded history's entwinement with suffering.) Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory reject any attempt at reliving a sentimentally stylized past, and they unfold a theory that sketches out an unregimented knowledge and experience of nature. The foil for such a theory, which is no doubt a constructive effort by a thinker frequently

accused of defeatism, is provided by Dialectic of Enlightenment's account of the instrumental-rational constriction of experience.

In Negative Dialectics, Adorno distinguishes between theory, which he understands as immanent critique, and spontaneous, unregimented experience.⁶⁹ To be sure, as I will detail later, he does not absolutize that distinction. Adorno maintains that the force bureaucratized society exerts upon consciousness cannot be grasped and criticized if thought is structured around categories external to the system of domination. Already in Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno view such philosophies as Zen as feeble attempts at escaping the industrial, technocratic and scientistic discipline enforced by modern social institutions. In Negative Dialectics, Adorno points out that the integrative power of a society coordinated by such institutions requires of the critique of that society that it not be disjointed. (It is a measure of the cognitive reach of Karl Marx's immanent critique of political economy and capitalism, in contrast, say, to aristocratic or romanticist critiques, that his thought continues to be violently persecuted by the overseers of capital.) For Adorno, romanticized idealizations of a bucolic past, Heidegger's metaphysical yearning for a putatively non-metaphysical being⁷⁰ and Bergson's intuitionism,⁷¹ catapult thought away from its socio-

historical context, thus leaving the latter uncriticized in its systemic consolidation. (On Adorno's understanding of theory, the pretense of the mainstream media in the United States to being an autonomous institution guarding against tyranny and oppression is left unscathed by arguing that technologized communications are yet another instantiation of the self-concealment of being. In contrast, an immanent critique of the mainstream media would elucidate in detail the gap between their claim to enlighten the citizenry and their consistent refusal to give a voice to those whose experience contradicts the affirmative self-understanding of contemporary capitalism in the United States.)

The frequent criticism directed against Adorno that he absolutizes negativism fails to take into account his notion of an unregimented knowledge and experience of the material world.⁷² This notion bears the influence of the Kantian concept of spontaneity. Adorno sees empiricism and positivism as consigning the cognizing subject to passive acquiescence before the realm of facts. Echoing Friederich Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin,⁷³ however, Dialectic of Enlightenment characterizes Kant's critique of reason as being insufficiently critical, as leaving the Newtonian understanding of experience unproblematic. For Adorno, a spontaneous experience of objects would cease to involve a cognitive subject that projects onto them its rigidified identity. Such an experience, he avers, would respect the difference, the non-identity between subject and object. As

I will explain toward the end of the chapter, Adorno does not understand the said difference as a neat dichotomy; rather, he understands it in terms of a dynamic interaction between subject and object. The manifold qualities of objects, Adorno claims, are not subsumable in merely subjectivist fashion under logically autonomous concepts. If the error of Hegelian idealism consists in the panlogistic identification of the world as if the world were the reflexive movement of spirit, empiricism and positivism falsely deny the subjective mediation of experience, Adorno suggests. In both cases, the tension between subject and object is artificially released, according to Adorno. He argues that a mode of cognition that would retain this tension would be one in which the subject would relativize itself, that is to say, one in which it would recognize its own objective, material elements. An unregimented subjective knowledge and experience of objects,⁷⁴ for Adorno, would not obscure subjective nature's affinity with outer nature. An unregimented self, Adorno surmises, would not be destructive of sensorial pleasure, use-value or the possibility of harmony between the mental and the material.

In Negative Dialectics, Adorno discusses what he terms 'unregimented experience' in the subjunctive mood.

Dialectic of Enlightenment's thesis that modern society verges on reducing the self to being a mechanism of conditioned reflexes-- to being obedient at the site of production, supportive of the drivel dished out by the

culture industry and heteronomously consumerist--is retained in Negative Dialectics. If Adorno does not theorize there in the indicative mood about spontaneous experience, it is so in accordance with his view that contemporary society reproduces the reification of consciousness. A changed consciousness, for him, cannot be abstractly foisted upon an instrumentalized praxis. To be sure, as I will argue below, Adorno interprets some modern art works as an index of a spontaneous, noninstrumental, aesthetic experience of nature.⁷⁵ For him, this aesthetic experience gives us a glimpse of a society in which human beings would relate to the material world in noninstrumental fashion. Yet he does not deify contemporary aesthetic experience, for in his view the autonomous art of the bourgeois era has the social division of labor as its material condition of possibility.

As I will argue in more detail later in the chapter, Adorno does not absolutize his distinction between theory (that is, immanent critique) and unregimented experience. Adorno sees in the knowledge and experience of what he characterizes as the most advanced modern works of art the anticipation of a non-domineering subjective experience of nature. For Adorno, the material world is not exhaustively identifiable by the cognizing subject. In prefiguring an unregimented interaction between the subject, on the one hand, and the external world and inner nature, on the other hand, aesthetic knowledge and experience contribute to the immanent critique of a contemporary society conditioned by

and reproductive of reified consciousness, Adorno holds. Aesthetic knowledge and experience, according to Adorno, illuminate the concept of a non-mechanical subjectivity. In his view, aesthetic knowledge and experience thereby contribute to the critique of contemporary society, which, although it is materially capable of fostering the development of a community of free individuals, compulsively continues to recycle instrumental thought and action.

Anke Thyen's excellent discussion of Adorno's Negative Dialectics called to my attention the importance Adorno attaches to the notion of an unregimented subjective experience. But my reading of Adorno's philosophy differs significantly from Thyen's. Thyen decouples Negative Dialectics from Dialectic of Enlightenment, which she characterizes as articulating a pessimistic, negativist philosophico-historical account of Western enlightenment. So far, I have not encountered much by way of a clarification of what is meant by 'philosophico- historical' in the context of an interpretation of Dialectic of Enlightenment. Helga Gripp, in her book Juergen Habermas, goes some way toward such a clarification. She argues that philosophico-historical reconstructions of the course of civilization identify a subject as the motor of history and ascribe direction and meaning to history. Gripp maintains that the early Frankfurt School, with Hegel and Marx, located such meaning in nature-transforming human labor.

Gripp notes quite correctly that already in the late 1930s the Frankfurt School ceased to view the proletariat as the privileged subject of history.

Dialectic of Enlightenment agrees with Weber's claim that modernization brings about the progressive loss of meaning, the increasing desubstantialization of reason. Further, as I argue in my second chapter, Adorno and Horkheimer no longer think that human labor is necessarily liberatory. In contradistinction to Kant's and Hegel's philosophies of history, Dialectic of Enlightenment does not conceive of reason or spirit as legislating history's telos. Arguably, Horkheimer and Adorno attribute to what they characterize as the progressive subjective domination of the material world an immanent teleology. That is to say, a reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment that takes Adorno and Horkheimer to be arguing that the archaic endeavor to pacify nature contains the seeds of the process by which the subject is progressively dematerialized seems to me not to be implausible. Yet for them, such a process is not under conscious control, human or otherwise. Clearly, Dialectic of Enlightenment does not interpret civilization as if it were governed by an Aristotelian final cause. The course of human history, for Adorno and Horkheimer, is not deterministically fixed; nor do they herald the end of history.

In any event, Thyen's point is to argue that Horkheimer and Adorno offer a grand abstraction to characterize the

whole history of enlightenment, and that the said abstraction cannot survive detailed historiographic scrutiny. Thyen proceeds to claim that Adorno's negative-dialectical concept of the lack of identity between subject and object ought to be seen, not as a philosophico-historical category, but as a Weberian ideal type suggestive of a discursive and non-reified subjective experience. According to Thyen, who in this regard agrees with Habermas, Dialectic of Enlightenment globalizes instrumental reason. She adds that Horkheimer and Adorno thereby miss Weber's insight that means-ends rationality cannot be fully decoupled from value-rationality. Thyen's critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment, which she correctly reads as being influenced by Weber's theory of the rationalization of modernity, is that in reducing enlightenment reason to its instrumental form it releases the Weberian tension between means-ends rationality and value-rationality. For Thyen, although Weber distinguishes between means-ends rationality and value-rationality, he does not absolutize the distinction. She interprets Weber's theory as advancing the view that inherent in all strategic action is an ineradicable element of valuation. Thyen concludes that whereas Dialectic of Enlightenment misses the value-rationality immanent in strategic thinking, Adorno's notion (developed in Negative Dialectics) of an unregimented subjective experience is sensitive to the connection between instrumental and goal-oriented action.

Thyen does not explain why she thinks the concept of enlightenment developed in Dialectic of Enlightenment must be interpreted as a philosophico-historical category rather than as a Weberian ideal type. Nor does she explain why she takes Adorno's notion of a subjective experience sensitive to its non-identity with nature to be unrelated to Dialectic of Enlightenment's putative philosophico-historical framework. I do not mean to take a position with respect to any of these interpretations, but it does seem to me that Thyen's basic hermeneutical approach to Dialectic of Enlightenment and Negative Dialectics is external to the texts. Thus she does not broach at all Adorno's critique of Weber's concept of ideal types. According to Adorno, the said concept is rather arbitrary, for it is obtained in merely subjectivist, epistemological fashion. In relying upon Weber's notion of ideal types to explain what she terms 'Adorno's theory of subjective experience', Thyen passes over in silence the materialist motifs inherent in Adorno's notion of a subjectivity that would engage with and yet respect the alterity of the objective world.

Furthermore, I do not think that Adorno's idea of an unregimented subjective knowledge and experience can be at all understood in abstraction from the theory of the formation of subjectivity unfolded in Dialectic of Enlightenment. For all the talk about the putatively speculative, philosophico-historical character of Dialectic of Enlightenment, it is indisputable that Horkheimer and

Adorno offer a localized theory of the fate of consciousness under Stalinism, fascism, bourgeois morality, the culture industry and the positivist deification of facts. Moreover, Thyen's attempt at divorcing Adorno's concept of experience, which she stylizes as an ideal type, from Dialectic of Enlightenment fails to take into account Adorno's repeated claim--to be found, for instance, in his lecture Erziehung nach Auschwitz--that Auschwitz's material and subjective conditions of possibility have remained in place. (Indeed, one need only visit New York City to experience bourgeois indifference in all its poignancy.) It is against the backdrop of Dialectic of Enlightenment's theory of subjectivization that Adorno conceives of a possible unregimented experience.

In addition, Thyen characterizes Negative Dialectics as a theory of subjective experience without at all discussing the distinction Adorno draws there between theory and unregimented experience. Although both Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory concern themselves with the concept of a non-instrumental cognition, this does not mean that Adorno understands a knowledge sensitive to its non-identity with its object as if it were exclusively discursive. To be sure, in claiming that Adorno's notion of a non-autocratic subjective cognition is discursive, Thyen seeks to rescue Adorno's category of the non-identical from the charge of irrationality. In point of fact, Habermas takes Adorno in this context to be merely gesticulating. But is rationality

exhaustively discursive? Doesn't Adorno in Aesthetic Theory develop a theory of an aesthetic rationality that recovers the mimetic element of cognition he thinks was lost in the course of the instrumentalization of nature? In her discussion of Negative Dialectics, Thyen does not even mention the word 'aesthetics', let alone Adorno's Aesthetic Theory, and her account of Adorno's critique of instrumental and identity thought remains imprisoned within a constrictive understanding of rationality as if it were exclusively discursive. Thyen elides without an explanation Adorno's constructive attempt at sketching out an aesthetic rationality that would not cancel the difference between cognition and experience. A discussion of that attempt follows.

In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno interpret the history of the language of enlightenment as the progressive separation between abstract, formal, nominalistic cognitive signs and mimetic tones and images. To be sure, they characterize scientistically construed knowledge as the mimetic, tautological ratification of instrumentalized nature. That is to say, such knowledge blocks critical reflection upon social reality, and it represses the recollection of the suffering wrought in the course of the subjective domination of nature, according Dialectic of Enlightenment. The images and sounds manufactured by the entertainment and information industry,

for their part, drop art's capacity for giving expression to social antagonisms, domination and suffering, Adorno and Horkheimer maintain. Under the aegis of the culture industry, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment, tones and images become abstract signs in the service of the maximization of exchange-value.

In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno laconically characterize the autonomous art of the bourgeois era as the site of social critique. (Adorno's concept of autonomous works of art will be dealt with below.) Adorno's Aesthetic Theory develops the view that the knowledge and experience of autonomous art works evades the instrumental interaction between subject and object that for Dialectic of Enlightenment is characteristic of scientism and the culture industry.⁷⁶ Adorno's categories of aesthetic cognition and experience must be understood as normative. He does not take the reception of works of art in contemporary society to be an index of their truth content.

Both Hans Robert Jauss⁷⁷ and Peter Buerger⁷⁸ have criticized Adorno for disregarding aesthetic reception. They correctly point out that Adorno's Aesthetic Theory privileges aesthetic form as the locus of artistic meaning and truth.⁷⁹ Thus, for Adorno, the significance of specific works by such artists as Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka and Arnold Schoenberg, which works he takes to be at the cutting edge of modernism, lies not in their serviceability to this or that political cause or in whether this or that crowd

identifies with particular motifs or characters. Rather, Adorno contends, such works are important for the way they revolutionize artistic form. Schoenberg's atonal music, according to Adorno, liberates musical idiom from the regime of such canons of composition as a governing home key. The composer Adrian Leverkuehn in Thomas Mann's Doctor Faustus, a novel constructed with the help of Adorno's musicological advice and no doubt indebted to Schoenberg's Harmonielehre, speaks of a musical idiom in which no tone is subservient to a ruling motif. But Adorno does not take aesthetic form to be unrelated to society. He interprets the autonomy of tones in atonal compositions as allegorically prefiguring a community of free individuals. Jauss asserts that Adorno misses the communicative role of art as a source of social values. Buerger says that his own experience with groups of young people gathered to discuss works of literature suggests that their reception of content can have the socially emancipatory function of stimulating critical self-reflection. Leaving aside the question whether there is any merit to the critiques by Jauss and Buerger of Adorno's privileging of aesthetic form, they seem to me to miss one implication of Adorno's concepts of aesthetic cognition and experience for his notion of an unregimented subjectivity. I have in mind the implication that, on Adorno's theory, an unregimented self would be unlike the autarchic instrumental subject in that it would be **receptive** toward art and nature. But Jauss and Buerger correctly stress that Adorno's

sociology of art dismisses aesthetic reception in contemporary society as the proper focal point of a cognitivist philosophical aesthetics. Aesthetic Theory subscribes to Dialectic of Enlightenment's thesis that the predominant modern consciousness is buffeted and blunted by such phenomena as technocratic management, anxiety in the face of weapons of mass destruction, oligopolistic control of the economy, and the official lies cheerfully spread by the organs of mass communications. In Aesthetic Theory, Adorno holds that the said consciousness does not give the measure of the truth about contemporary society immanent in particular works of art.

Perhaps the following discussion will illustrate the relation Adorno establishes between artistic form and modern society. Alfred Doeblin's Berlinalexanderplatz, with its stream of consciousness style, seems to me to give expression to what Adorno characterizes as the fragmentation of the self. In Doeblin's novel, both Franz Biberkopf's unsublimated drives and his entrepreneurial, instrumentally rational calculations for making a living as a street vendor find articulation. The novel's splintered narrative is the stylistic analogue of Biberkopf's shattered, discontinuous self amidst the underworld of the late Weimar Republic. Further, inscribed in the dissonant moments in Mahler's Song of a Wayfarer are, I think, the wounds of the modern isolated individual. And cubist allusions to human forms seem to me to mobilize mathematical figures to depict the

dehumanization wrought by the progressive mathematization of nature. Cubist geometric renderings of human forms give expression, in my view, to the pummelling human beings take in technocratic society, governed as it is by the scientistic glorification of mathematized natural science. Thought monistically committed to mathematical and scientific certainty deforms human life.

Adorno's philosophical aesthetics concerns itself with the relation between the knowledge of art and its experience.⁸⁰ For Adorno, aesthetic cognition in the absence of experience is empty, whereas aesthetic experience devoid of theory is blind. But he does not idealistically subsume experience under knowledge or, in empiricist fashion, cognition under experience. Aesthetic experience unfetters an otherwise subjective, self-absorbed conceptualization, while theory extricates experience from naive, passive reception, he argues.

Yet Adorno does not harmonize aesthetic cognition and experience: concepts, on the one hand, and tones, images and poetic language, on the other hand, are in his view not intertranslatable. Adorno argues that musical idiom is distorted if it is taken to evoke sceneries or stories. To interpret music in such a fashion, he maintains, is to shatter the autonomy of the formal principles of composition to which musical idiom adheres. He thinks that to incorporate musical motifs in film for the sake of providing "atmosphere" is violently to sunder the said motifs from the

carefully crafted musical totalities to which they belong; it is falsely to amalgamate cinematography, script and musical fragments, as if they constituted a unified language. Further: in agreement with Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, Adorno criticizes picture-thinking. His remarks to this effect are laconic, but I suspect that he takes picture-thinking as dehistoricizing both language and its object. Perhaps the following example will illustrate the previous point. Habermas claims that subsystems of purposive rational action such as money and power colonize the lifeworld. Notwithstanding his polemic against what he sees as Dialectic of Enlightenment's philosophico-historical breadth, the most he does to historicize his concept of the life-world is to situate its referent in modernity. His spatial account of the invasion by non-linguistic media for the coordination of social action of a sphere of implicitly rational, non-coercive communication, robs linguistic interaction of its diversity and historical dynamism. Habermas's constrictive territorial understanding of the lifeworld colludes with his rationalization of linguistic competence to congeal language.

Works of art, Adorno claims, do not speak for themselves. He thinks that the knowledge about society implicit in autonomous art works needs to be interpretively disclosed. Already in his lecture Die Aktualitaet der Philosophie, Adorno assigns to philosophy the task of interpretation. The social world, for Adorno, cannot be

taken at its word. Autonomous art works, Adorno avers, are cognitively significant precisely because they abstract from social functionalization. Thus, it would be mistaken to read Adorno's notion of autonomy as an endorsement of the 19th Century ideology of art for art's sake. Like conceptualization, the construction of art works is a subjective activity, Adorno maintains.⁸¹ (I do not thereby mean to imply that Adorno conceives of them as being exclusively subjective.) Yet the most advanced autonomous works of art, for Adorno, do not subsume their material under universal, abstractive principles. According to Adorno, such works, in contradistinction to the instrumental subject, do not standardize or quantify their material in order to render it utilizable for technical and scientific purposes. The funereal and folk motifs in Mahler's music might illustrate Adorno's point in that they are not instances or samples, in the scientific sense, of funeral marches and folk songs. Nor are they abstractions. Instead, these motifs are incorporated into and elaborated within compositions that adhere to musical form, rather than to the logic of instrumental reason. In Adorno's view, the constructive, aesthetic-subjective engagement with artistic material differs from the instrumental-subjective domination of nature. In its relative freedom from enlightenment instrumentalization, aesthetic construction hints at a non-rigidifying subject that would cease to convert nature to abstract exchange-value, Adorno argues. (I say 'relative

freedom' because Adorno thematizes the role of technique in the construction of works of art.) If the aesthetic-subjective construction of art works has the effect of imposing order on the material elements integrated in such works, Adorno asserts, it does not thereby eliminate the qualities, the differential features of its object.

According to Adorno, autonomous works of art are not exhaustively defined by their aesthetic-subjective, constructive intervention. Such works, he states, give expression to societal fractures.⁸² That is to say, autonomous works of art, for Adorno, do not engage with the material world after the fashion of the autarchic instrumental subject. He claims that such works do not sever all links with social reality. Adorno does not locate the expression of societal antagonisms in the content of autonomous art works, but in their form. Thus, for Adorno, Beckett's language codifies the collapse of religious and metaphysical meaning, and it gives expression to the demeaning administration of life and death in our age. (Incidentally, Dialectic of Enlightenment does not exempt religion and metaphysics from its thesis of an entwinement between power and thought. But it does interpret the positivist dissolution of metaphysics and religion as an index of the progressive evisceration of critical reflection.) If Beckett's language is productive of meaning, Adorno suggests, it is in the negative sense of registering the progressive loss of meaning, the increasing

desubstantialization of reason, in the course of modernization.⁸³ I would add that if there is a remnant in Beckett's Endgame and Waiting for Godot of the immutability with which metaphysics and monotheism invested truth and meaning, it is the motionlessness of the characters.

Aesthetic construction, on Adorno's Aesthetic Theory, is suggestive of a non-abstractive, non-commodifying subjective engagement with the material world. It is thus an intimation of an alternative to instrumental reason, which converts nature into stuff expendable for the sake of profit and for the sake of scientific and technological development, Adorno maintains. He models his notion of knowledge of works of art after what he characterizes as their subjective construction. Knowledge of the cognitive significance of autonomous art works, for Adorno, does not proceed by standardizing them or reducing them to commodities. Adorno insists on their being individually interpreted, on their uniqueness. He criticizes Walter Benjamin's positive valuation of technologically reproducible art as being oblivious to what Dialectic of Enlightenment terms the instrumentalization of enlightenment in the service of mass deception.⁸⁴ On this view, the only value of most commercial films is exchange-value.

I think it important to emphasize Adorno's view that it is indispensable to engage in concrete and detailed interpretations of particular artistic objects. According to a widespread criticism, Adorno's philosophy is reductive.

His work is said to center on some core themes--for instance, on the commodification of consciousness, the intertwinement between nature and history, and the relation between enlightenment and myth--and the said themes are said to inform a uniformly pessimistic, negativist view of civilization. Adorno's thought is thus seen as the night in which all cows are gray. It seems to me, though, that the charge of reductionism frequently leveled at Adorno's philosophy misses the diversity of his work. To be sure, his writings await an interpretation sensitive to detail of the relation between his philosophical tracts and the more localized studies of art works, social contradictions, psychology, the teaching profession, and so forth. In any event, I suspect that the relation between Adorno's theory of art and his own experience of individual art works illustrates the tension his philosophical aesthetics claims to register between aesthetic cognition and experience. Even a cursory reading of Adorno's detailed studies of individual works of art suggests that his aesthetic experience is not exhaustively conditioned by antecedent theoretical commitments. Already the title of his essay on Beckett's Endgame, An Attempt at Understanding Endgame, seems to me to respect the difference between conceptualization and art, which difference both Dialectic of Enlightenment and Aesthetic Theory thematize, at the same time that it gives expression to his attempt at fusing the horizons of aesthetic knowledge and artistic experience.

Theory, for Adorno, saves the experience of art works from naivete. Aesthetic experience, he asserts, frees the subject from its constrictive, isolating, petrifying labor of self-preservation. Aesthetic experience, on Adorno's theory, subverts the culture industry's mobilization of the unconscious in the interest of profit. (Indeed, such unrelenting trash as the films Dick Tracy, Batman and Rambo, fills the coffers of the oligopolistic film industry by targeting and igniting unsublimated unconscious forces. The said films express nostalgia for the opportunity to lash out in unbridled fashion against clearly identifiable enemies. Both Dick Tracy and Batman mark the villainous other physiognomically, thus resurrecting the fascist fixation with biologicistic criteria.) Hans Robert Jauss accuses Adorno of failing to consider the cathartic effect of mass entertainment. For Adorno, by desensitizing its audience, the culture industry has the effect of normalizing contemporary society, defined as it is by violence. He argues further that the aestheticization of violence produces conformity in the viewers who are thereby taught to make their peace with societally sanctioned violence. For Dialectic of Enlightenment, in consonance with Herbert Marcuse's thesis of repressive desublimation, the culture industry is psychoanalysis in reverse.

Yet, although for Adorno aesthetic experience eludes commodification and manipulation, he does not think the experience of autonomous art works exempt from the social

division of labor. Even the sublimated experience of an art work, in Adorno's view, cannot enter the roots of such a work in a conflictual society. Aesthetic experience, Adorno suggests, remains at present a privilege. But he contends that its being a privilege does not vitiate it. Rather, Adorno takes such experience, together with non-instrumental aesthetic knowledge, to be an allegory of harmonious relations between humans and nature, and among human beings themselves.

Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory develop Dialectic of Enlightenment's insight into the dynamic character of language and reason. Adorno's linguistic constellations aestheticize logic, if the latter is understood in terms of the double sense of logos as narrative account and as the offering of justification for what is said. Ruediger Bubner claims that Adorno's materialist motifs and his rejection of foundationalism reveal a refusal on Adorno's part to thematize and defend the presuppositions of his theory.⁸⁵ But Bubner's critique does not address Adorno's notion of a logic of disintegration.⁸⁶ Negative Dialectics claims conceptually to unearth the limitations of concepts, their insufficiency in the face of the complexity and historicity of their objects. Negative Dialectics thus undertakes to implode, so to speak, the self-sufficient, narcissistic, conceptualizing rationality that, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment,

becomes dominant in the course of subjectivization. Adorno conceives of linguistic constellations as approximations to objects, which approximations he thinks are sensitive to the differential qualities of the material world. Indeed, Negative Dialectics facilitates an explanation of Dialectic of Enlightenment's textual architecture. Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment unfolds a theory of the formation of a domineering subjectivity, and its textual layout subverts what they characterize as the systematizing imperiousness of instrumental reason. As I will explain in the next chapter, Adorno understands his concept of linguistic constellations as the outcome of subjective reflection upon the nominalistic character of instrumental-subjective thought. In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno do not thematize such self-reflection.

Adorno's Aesthetic Theory develops the concept of an aesthetic subjectivity. For Adorno, the aesthetic-subjective engagement with the material world does not stand outside the social division of labor; it does not escape the violent splitting of the mental from the material. Yet, for Adorno, the aesthetic subject experiences its materials, both in the construction and the reception of autonomous art works, in non-manipulative, non-abstractive, unregimented fashion.

Under the signature of his notion of the rationalization of linguistic competence, Habermas straightjackets his interpretation of Dialectic of

Enlightenment. He views Dialectic of Enlightenment as globalizing instrumental reason and hence as failing philosophically to anchor its own discourse, but that view is the projection of his regimentation of language. In Aesthetic Theory, Adorno offers an idea of aesthetic rationality that points to the utopia of a non-reifying knowledge and an unfettered experience of the world.

CHAPTER 4

HABERMAS AND ADORNO ON REFLEXIVE GROUNDING AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

This dissertation set out to defend the thesis that Adorno's elaboration in Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory of the theory of the formation of subjectivity articulated in Dialectic of Enlightenment avoids Habermas's misreading of the latter text. In the previous chapters, I argue that Habermas straightjackets Dialectic of Enlightenment as if it treated of its object, the process of enlightenment, in monistic fashion. Habermas claims that Horkheimer and Adorno conceive of enlightenment as having degenerated into an omnipresent instrumental rationality, and that they thereby lose the capacity to justify their own non-instrumental, yet undoubtedly rational discussion of enlightenment thought. For Habermas, as I will emphasize below, critical social theory is enfeebled if it fails rationally to ground the categories by virtue of which it condemns bourgeois society of failing to live up to its ideals of justice, democracy, liberty and equality. Rational justification, according to Habermas, consists in the determination of the validity of speech-acts under conditions of free dialogue. Rationality, for Habermas, is secured by way of communicative interaction. Indeed, he argues that rationality is inconceivable outside the framework of linguistic exchange.

Habermas argues that Dialectic of Enlightenment fails to register the potential for a rational society embedded in

modern everyday communication, which communication he thinks is susceptible of recursive justification.⁸⁷ Thus Dialectic of Enlightenment, in his view, cannot point to the way out of a society that it characterizes as being governed by instrumental knowledge and action. Had Horkheimer and Adorno recognized that their own theory raises claims to validity capable of discursive problematization, Habermas maintains, they would have been able to plot a line of escape from the technocratic, scientistic, totally administered world he claims they posit. According to Habermas, even though Adorno's Negative Dialectics, unlike Dialectic of Enlightenment, does seek to elucidate its own presuppositions, it gets caught up in a paradox it cannot resolve: Negative Dialectics, Habermas notes, employs concepts to advance the claim that concepts do not congruently capture their object. Negative Dialectics, on Habermas's reading, cannot avoid destabilizing its own conceptual scaffolding. And I take it that he interprets Adorno's Aesthetic Theory as exacerbating the theoretical instability of Negative Dialectics.⁸⁸ Habermas seems to hold that the idea developed in Aesthetic Theory that certain modern works of art mimetically capture fundamental truths about advanced industrial society cannot be philosophically grounded. Indeed, he states that Adorno's notion of mimesis amounts to gesticulation. I will discuss in some detail Adorno's concept of mimesis and Habermas's treatment of it later in the chapter. Suffice it to say for

the moment that from the standpoint of Habermas's theory of communicative action, according to which truth is consensually established by intersubjectively and recursively testing the validity of speech acts, Adorno's idea that some works of art contain true knowledge about modern society could not be theoretically grounded. Habermas's reasoning seems to be that in locating truth outside the matrix of communicative action Adorno places his own linguistic claims about the incongruency between concept and object and about the mimetic capacity of art works beyond the space of recursive justification.

In the third chapter, I maintain that Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory sketch out a theory of a non-rigidifying subjective knowledge and experience, which theory is in my view dependent on the account of the formation of subjectivity developed in Dialectic of Enlightenment. Habermas's reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment misses Horkheimer and Adorno's differentiated treatment of the concept of enlightenment, and it thereby disregards their idea that the possibility for critical reflection upon the blind progress of instrumentalization has not been extinguished. Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory take such critical reflection to be a conditio sine qua non of an unregimented self that would harmoniously interact with nature. The present chapter examines what I take to be Habermas's chief objection against Adorno's philosophy, namely that it cannot be

rationally grounded. Habermas seems to hold that critical social theory is capable of recursive justification and, ultimately, of being grounded only if it acknowledges that its own truth can only be established consensually. Dialectic of Enlightenment, Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory ascribe in Hegelian fashion truth and falsity to societal conditions and to the relation between subjectivity and nature. Habermas reads Dialectic of Enlightenment as lacking reflexivity, as failing to recognize that the validity of its own claims can only be decided upon on the basis of the intersubjective character and recursive elasticity of language. His rather casual discussion of Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory suggests that he takes the previous point about Dialectic of Enlightenment to apply to those texts too. Habermas appears to interpret Adorno's language as inflicting a wound on itself, so to speak, as blocking the path of reflexive justification by situating the conditions of its truth in material processes.

In what follows, I advance the view that Habermas's critique of Adorno's philosophy is not cogent. (I do not take a position with respect to one of the questions Habermas's communicative turn raises, the question namely whether his theory of communicative action is preferable to Adorno's problematization of the truth-content of what he terms 'autonomous works of art'.) I argue that Habermas falsely assumes that his concept of rational grounding, on

the basis of which he criticizes Adorno's thought and first-generation critical theory as being irreflexive, is already intelligible. Habermas's notion of rational grounding is parasitic upon his counterfactual category of a deliberative procedure open to all possible rational speakers. I maintain that the (perhaps insurmountable) difficulties surrounding the implementation of anything like universal distortion-free communication, which difficulties Habermas acknowledges, underscore the obscurity of the idea of the ideal speech situation and of the attendant concept of rational grounding.

I do not mean to argue that what is erroneous about the interpretation of Adorno's thought I attribute to Habermas (according to which Adorno's thought is impervious to recursive grounding) is its unclarity about the implementation of ideal speech. The contemporary world is governed by a compulsive, destructive and blind productivism geared toward the eternal return of privately appropriated profit. A theory such as Habermas's that calls for a communicative structure in which functional rationality would be critically examined is bound to be obscure. Just as the possibility of an unregimented experience is not immediately accessible to a person neurotically committed to repetitive behavior, a possible noncoercive communicative praxis is not clearly visible to a society ruled by insidious, crisis-stabilizing technocratic powers. My objection to Habermas's reception of Adorno's thought,

rather, is that Habermas criticizes Adorno as if a universal communicative procedure that would recursively ground speech-acts were already clearly understandable.

Habermas also holds that Adorno's thought remains caught up within what he calls the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness, and that his own focus on communicative action overcomes the paradoxes that he thinks terminally beset the philosophy of consciousness. I will expound upon Habermas's rather complex notion of the philosophy of consciousness shortly. Suffice it to say for the moment that for Habermas what defines the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness is that it posits both a cognizing subject supposedly capable in monadic fashion of adjudicating the truth of knowledge-claims and a monistic practical subject. Habermas offers few historical details, which might clarify the referents of his notion of the philosophy of consciousness. It seems, though, that he has in mind the epistemologies of Descartes, Kant and Fichte, and Marx's historical materialism. (Habermas's discussion in Labor and Interaction of Hegel's Jena writings advances the view that in those writings Hegel conceives of subjectivity, labor and human interaction as communicatively constituted. This suggests that Hegel's thought does not fit neatly into what Habermas terms the philosophy of consciousness.) According to Habermas, the philosophy of consciousness misses the intersubjective, communicative dimension of knowledge.

Habermas does not develop his claim that Adorno's thought does not exit the space of the philosophy of consciousness. In the present chapter, I unpack Habermas's claim and examine it critically. Habermas's main point seems to be that Adorno's conception of the relation between subject and object abstracts from what he sees as the communicative matrix of knowledge. Further, Habermas explicitly agrees with Axel Honneth's view that Dialectic of Enlightenment treats of subjective consciousness as if it were not socially constituted.⁸⁹ For Honneth and Habermas, Dialectic of Enlightenment treats of the formation of subjectivity solely in terms of the subject's instrumental commerce with nature. Habermas argues, in contrast, that the subject can only be understood as a product of processes of acculturation and socialization, which for him are eminently communicative. In the present chapter, I maintain that Adorno's notion of an unregimented subjective knowledge and experience of nature is indebted to the concept of an agential, spontaneous subjective consciousness, a concept that I think Habermas would situate in the context of the philosophy of consciousness. Yet it seems to me that Habermas's discussion of the philosophy of consciousness is not elastic enough to accommodate the differences between Adorno's thought and subject-centered epistemologies. Adorno does not conceive of subjective consciousness as if it were the ground of clear and distinct ideas, objective knowledge or absolute truth. My account later in the

chapter of Adorno's notions of mimesis⁹⁰ and of the preponderance of the object⁹¹ is aimed at establishing the previous point.

In claiming that Adorno's thought remains imprisoned within the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness, Habermas means of course to convict Adorno's philosophy of an error. For Habermas, I suppose, Adorno's thought shares with the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness the inability to locate in everyday communicative action the seeds of distortion-free communication, of communicative rationality. In the present chapter, I argue that because of the way Habermas constructs the ideal speech situation he ends up subverting his view that it is a desideratum for philosophy to overcome subject-centered thought. Put schematically, my claim is that Habermas does not stabilize his conception of subjectivity. On the one hand, he argues that the subject is an effect of modern processes of socialization and acculturation, and he confers upon communicative action both logical and anthropological primacy.⁹² On the other hand, he thinks it a necessary condition of distortion-free communication that the deliberating agents be autonomous subjects. To the best of my knowledge, he has not explained how he thinks that his thesis of the primacy of communicative action is congruent with his notion that distortion-free communication requires autonomous subjective agents. I very much doubt that they are congruent with each other. If, as Habermas holds,

modern subjects become subjects as a result of processes of socialization and acculturation, the subjective autonomy to which he alludes would be an effect of communicative action, which is to say that it would not be subjective autonomy at all. It is true that Habermas imagines the ideal speech situation as a means for the participants to achieve self-transparency about theoretical, moral and aesthetic questions, whatever that might mean. Perhaps he believes that subjects become autonomous when they recognize themselves as the agents of a social consensus that has left behind all obscurities, be they the result of ideology, unconscious repression or strategic manipulation. The instrument for attaining subjective autonomy would thus be linguistic exchange devoid of coercion, and subjective autonomy would mean that each speaker freely agrees with the discursively produced consensus. The trouble with this line of reasoning is that Habermas himself characterizes the ideal speech situation minimalistically in terms of its procedural requirements and refuses substantively to speculate about the outcome of distortion-free communication. He does explicitly hold that such modern phenomena as parliamentary government, the dissolution of religious and metaphysical worldviews, the decentered subject conceptualized by Piaget and the morally developed individual thematized by Kohlberg are necessary conditions for distortion-free communication, as is a yet to be explained subjective autonomy. So far as I can tell, the

idea of subjective autonomy finds expression in what Habermas terms the philosophy of consciousness, notably in Kant's moral philosophy. Habermas claims that this philosophy has run its course, and that his theory of communicative action leaves subject-centered thought behind. Yet, as I point out above, the notion of subjective autonomy is central to his account of the ideal speech situation. Habermas prizes subjective autonomy, but in positing the primacy of communicative action he calls into question the possibility of such autonomy. If, as I claim, Habermas's position with respect to the subject is paradoxical, it is not at all clear why he takes his assertion that Adorno does not exit the framework of the philosophy of consciousness to be a cogent criticism.

At issue is not merely a logical inconsistency in Habermas's thought. Habermas claims to leave the space of subject-centered thought, and he wishes to retain a version of a non-transcendental Kantianism. Thus, he states: "As a resource that nourishes the capacity of participants in [communicative] interaction to make statements capable of consensus, the lifeworld functions the [communicative] analogue of what subject-centered philosophy ascribed to consciousness as its synthetic achievement...."⁹³ The criticism of Habermas I develop in this chapter regarding the conflict between his notions of subjective autonomy and of the primacy of the lifeworld calls into question the tenability of his non-transcendental Kantianism.

Habermas gives few details from the history of philosophy that might help clarify his notion of the philosophy of consciousness. His discussion, rather, is mainly typological. The essential characteristic of the philosophy of consciousness, in his view, is that it posits a monological cognizing subject. By 'monological' is meant in this context that the knowing subject postulated by the philosophy of consciousness putatively secures true knowledge in abstraction from communicative practices. Habermas claims, for instance, that Kant conceives of the synthetic activity of the transcendental consciousness as if it were independent from intersubjective communication. And I take it that Habermas would direct the same criticism at Cartesian introspection, Fichte's concept of an absolute ego and Hegel's notion of an absolute spirit. That the linguistic media within which such categories as 'transcendental unity of apperception', 'absolute ego' and 'absolute spirit' figure are themselves the products of communicative and hence social interaction eludes Kant, Fichte⁹⁴ and Hegel, Habermas suggests. For its part, the Marxian idea that the human species progressively ceases to be the object of history by transforming nature through labor is, for Habermas, anchored in the philosophy of consciousness. Habermas's point is that Marx conceives of human labor as the vehicle for the formation of the human species as the agential subject of its own history. According to Habermas, Marx thereby privileges the

liberatory potential of human commerce with nature at the expense of an insight into the emancipatory possibilities inherent in communicative action. As I point out in the second chapter, Habermas understands communicative action as social action oriented toward the attainment of intersubjective agreement. Later in the present chapter, I will discuss in some detail Habermas's idea that communicative action harbors emancipatory possibilities.

Habermas asserts that the philosophy of consciousness has reached a dead end. He defends this assertion by claiming that "the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness" is beset by problems, by "aporias," that it cannot resolve, and that such problems vanish as soon as one takes his theoretical approach, centered as it is on the notion of communicative action. Thus Habermas avers that the philosophy of consciousness separates the transcendental from the empirical, establishes an opposition between human beings as agents of their history and as its objects, and is mired in the paradox of locating a putatively self-conscious subjectivity in a social milieu not fully within its grasp. Habermas's discussion is quite abstract. The following remarks are an attempt at clarification.

In Kant's philosophy, the empirical ego is understood as distinct from the logically unified transcendental subject. Kant, Habermas suggests, thereby misses the empirically ascertainable communicative basis of knowledge.

Habermas's claim seems to be that if forms of knowledge are indeed effects of lifeworld processes, Kant's idea that the rule-governed activity of the unified transcendental consciousness is the ground of objective knowledge must be rejected. Instead of anchoring cognitive certitude in a logically stabilized, disembodied self-consciousness, Habermas conceives of knowledge as the result of intersubjective consensus.

According to Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto, neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie is the agent of human history. The proletariat, they argue, has no say over the distribution of the social surplus, to which its labor gives rise, whereas the bourgeoisie, they claim, cannot avert such crises (of overproduction, for example) as are the inevitable result of the dynamic of capitalism. Although Marx and Engels hold that the course of capitalist society is not under the conscious control of human beings, they nonetheless envision a transformation toward a socialist society catalyzed by the proletariat's becoming aware of its position as an exploited class. For Habermas, I suspect, it is not at all clear how proletarian class consciousness is attainable if labor, to the exclusion of communicative action, is seen as the motor-force for overcoming class divided society.

As I suggest above, Habermas claims that the philosophy of consciousness leaves a third contradiction unresolved. On the one hand, the subject's movement from being-in-itself

toward being-for-itself is posited; on the other hand, the subject is placed within a social world it does not fully master. Perhaps a problem I see with Hegel's philosophy illustrates Habermas's claim. Hegel advances the view that modernity's distinctive mark is the emergence of subjectivity, of self-consciousness. His Philosophy of Right purports to trace the world spirit's march in the direction of an ethical order in which particular and universal, individual and monarch, subject and object are reconciled. Hegel sees Prussia's constitutional monarchy as the realization of what he takes to be the telos of human history: an ethical system in which subjectivity is neither neglected by nor in opposition to the universal, which he thinks is embodied by the state. The Philosophy of Right, however, registers an obstacle in what otherwise seems to be the smooth logical flow of a world spirit bent on attaining self-consciousness by actualizing itself in the world. Hegel argues that with the onset and in the aftermath of the industrial revolution civil society, which he defines as the system of needs, cannot avoid giving rise to an impoverished class. Already in the Philosophy of Right overproduction as a source of economic crises is thematized. Hegel, uncharacteristically, offers no solution to poverty, except to suggest melioristic welfare measures. His puzzlement about the means to overcome the poverty inherent in industrial society seems to me to deflate the panlogicism of his claim that the world spirit attains self-awareness

through its actualization in a Prussian-like monarchy. The world spirit's failure to stabilize the system of needs calls into question Hegel's world-historical triumphalism. And the impoverished individuals at the margin of civil society, he himself admits, are by virtue of their destitute condition robbed of the possibility to participate in ethical life as agential subjects. Social, economic, cultural and political processes unfold behind their backs.

As I will elucidate shortly, Habermas sees his turn toward the paradigm of communicative action as overcoming the paradoxes that he thinks terminally beset the philosophy of consciousness. He maintains that the essential trait of the human species is its capacity to engage in communicative action. Borrowing Noam Chomsky's term 'competence', Habermas universalistically attributes to human beings the competence to use language, which he takes to be necessarily intersubjective. Habermas characterizes his theory as the rational reconstruction of communicative competence. I will elaborate on the previous sentence below. For the moment, suffice it to say that Habermas thinks it empirically observable that in lifeworld contexts (that is, in pre-theoretical, unproblematized circumstances of linguistic exchange) human beings manifest their communicative competence by engaging in speech-acts. Habermas claims that the exchange of speech-acts harbors the latent expectation of intersubjective understanding. Implicit in all communication, Habermas argues, is the possibility of

settling disputes, removing obscurities, and reaching consensus about theoretical, moral and aesthetic questions. Habermas claims to reconstruct the capacity for undistorted communication immanent in lifeworld contexts by suggesting a communicative procedure in which speech-acts would be examined with regard to their validity. In his view, communicative rationality consists in a deliberative procedure that rules out coercion. Habermas links the lifeworld with communicative rationality: rationality, for him, is anchored neither in the synthesizing activity of a transcendental consciousness nor in the contemplation of a transcendent cosmic order; it is implicit, rather, in actual communication.

I think that Habermas sees his theory as avoiding the pitfalls of the philosophy of consciousness in the following fashion. He hopes to eschew the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical by taking as his point of departure for the theory of communicative rationality the fact of everyday communication. He acknowledges that his argument seems to proceed in transcendental fashion (in Kant's sense), for he inquires into the conditions of possibility of distortion-free communication. As I point out in the third chapter, his answer is that everyday speech-acts are capable of noncoercive--that is, discursive--problematization regarding their validity. For Habermas, though, discursive validation is not a transcendental-logical activity but an admittedly

counterfactually conceived intersubjective practice. (I think it rather doubtful that Habermas thereby overcomes the split between the transcendental and the empirical. He does not tailor the ideal speech situation to concrete historical conditions but views it as a universally valid deliberative procedure. Further, the imagined universal discursive community is supposed to be unified in its commitment to a single communicative procedure and hence seems as monolithic and logocentric as the logically unified transcendental consciousness posited by Kant.)

I argue above that perhaps the Communist Manifesto displays what Habermas sees as another vice typical of the philosophy of consciousness insofar as it does not satisfactorily explain how human beings can cease to be the objects of history to become its agents. I gather that Habermas seeks to avoid antinomically conceiving of humans as agents and as objects of history by proposing that modernity be understood as the progressive rationalization (in the sense of the advance of communicative rationality) of the lifeworld. That is, Habermas thinks that by their very communicative action human beings have succeeded in the course of modernization in moving toward a form of society informed by undistorted speech and away from mythical, religious and metaphysical world-views.

Instead of paradoxically situating putatively self-conscious subjects in social milieus they do not fully grasp, Habermas advances the view that all everyday

communication is an anticipation, a foretaste, so to speak, of a rational (that is, discursive) procedure, which he thinks must be conceptualized as possible in our world and which he believes would secure clarity about the social, natural and affective realms. (Habermas seems to assume that the rational communicative procedure he espouses is already intelligible. I will challenge this assumption toward the end of the present chapter.)

Before turning to Habermas's claim that Dialectic of Enlightenment and Adorno's later philosophy remain caught up within the framework of the philosophy of consciousness, I should like in some detail to trace the line Habermas draws between the lifeworld and the ideal speech situation. Habermas asserts that his investigation of the potential for undistorted communication immanent in the lifeworld aims to erase what he sees as the main deficit of Dialectic of Enlightenment and the rest of Adorno's philosophy: their refusal, namely, to provide a philosophical justification of their own concepts of rationality and a rational society. Habermas argues that implicit in Dialectic of Enlightenment's critique of instrumental reason and in Adorno's category of the nonidentical (that is, of a material realm not standardized by an abstractive subjectivity) is the notion of a noninstrumental form of thought. This notion, according to Habermas, is left without theoretical grounding, and it is not clearly

articulated; at best, he thinks, the notion is hinted at in the hopes for a better life to which Dialectic of Enlightenment and Adorno's later philosophy give expression.

Habermas thinks it indispensable that a critical theory of society be capable of explaining and defending the position from which it launches its critique. He undertakes to ground his own critical project by tapping into a property of language, namely its reflexivity. Wilhelm von Humboldt, Habermas notes, claims that language can refer to the external world, can point outside itself, but that it can also refer to itself. As I remark above, Habermas thinks of language as an intersubjective medium. He reformulates Humboldt's idea by ascribing reflexivity to communicative action. For Habermas, speech-acts, which he thinks are necessarily intersubjective, are capable of recursive problematization. To speak, he suggests, is to enter the terrain of communicative rationality. This is not to say that he takes all speech-acts to be valid. The point, rather, is to emphasize that Habermas locates the potential for a rational social formation in linguistic interaction. Habermas rejects the ancient concept of theoria, that is, of knowledge as the contemplation of a putatively harmoniously ordered and functioning cosmos.⁹⁵ He also rejects the notion of a reason anchored in the self-conscious activity of a monadic subject. Such conceptions, Habermas suggests, purport to locate truth outside the space of linguistic interaction. That they are deficient, he

further suggests, becomes obvious as soon as it is recognized that they themselves are the products of communicative action. Paradoxically, such conceptions claim to ground knowledge even though they fail to broach its communicative conditions of possibility. Habermas holds that critical social theory can be grounded in a notion of rationality, which he claims to secure by pointing to an argumentative procedure that would distinguish between valid and invalid speech-acts. Validity, which for Habermas comprises propositional truth, normative rightness, and subjective and aesthetic truthfulness (be that as it may), is supposed to be established once a consensus is freely and uncoercively arrived at by all participants in discursive deliberation. Such deliberation, the so-called ideal speech situation, Habermas asserts, is immanent in all communicative action as an expectation. Thus communicative action, according to Habermas, is reflexive insofar as in every conversation the possibility of a rational procedure for arriving at a universal consensus about theoretical, practical and aesthetic questions is counterfactually assumed. Habermas believes that it is a virtue of liberalism and of putatively liberal institutions such as parliamentary democracy, the mass media and constitutional government, that they have not foreclosed the possibility of the discursive elaboration of lifeworld communication, that they continue to tolerate the recursive elasticity of language.

Having discussed Habermas's notion of the philosophy of consciousness and the theoretical perspective from which he criticizes that notion, I should like to turn to his claim that Dialectic of Enlightenment and Adorno's later works remain imprisoned within the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. Habermas does not elaborate the latter claim, yet its implications are easily deduced. As I remark in the previous chapters, Habermas reads Dialectic of Enlightenment as if it argued that the contemporary world is governed by an all-encompassing instrumental rationality. Horkheimer and Adorno do articulate a theory of the formation of subjectivity according to which instrumentalization is the outcome of the progressive solidification of an autarchic and imperious subjectivity antinomically positioned against the material world. Pace Habermas, however, Adorno and Horkheimer do not reduce reason to its instrumental form. They argue that instrumental thought comes to be dominant in the course of modernization.

For Habermas, though, the essential point is that Dialectic of Enlightenment misses the rational potential of communicative action. Dialectic of Enlightenment, on Habermas's reading, is constrained by the Marxian belief in the emancipatory potential of labor, of instrumental action. To be sure, it positions itself negatively with respect to the said belief: whereas Marx thinks that the proletariat could constitute itself as the agential subject of a

socialist history, Horkheimer and Adorno--Habermas correctly notes--had already in the 1930s given up the idea of the proletariat as the privileged subject of history. Indeed, Habermas points out that Dialectic of Enlightenment articulates a negative philosophy of history. This means that Habermas takes Dialectic of Enlightenment to be informed by the question whether the telos of history is the formation of humanity as the agential subject of its history and to answer in the negative. At the price of detailed historical knowledge, Dialectic of Enlightenment, according to Habermas, straightjackets its account of the process of the formation of subjectivity within the horizon of a human history reduced to the history of the advance of instrumental reason.

Habermas contends that a theory sensitive to historical detail would not erase the differentiated character of modernity, which he thinks accommodates both instrumental and communicative action. For Habermas, the key to an understanding of human history is not the cognitive and instrumental agency of a monadic subject, but intersubjective communication, which he takes to point in the direction of a rational communicative procedure. Whereas Horkheimer and Adorno subsume the process of enlightenment under the category of a systematizing instrumental reason, Habermas maintains, modernity is properly understood in terms of the tension between system and lifeworld. He argues that although nonlinguistic

systemic media for the coordination of social action--to wit: money and administrative power--threaten to destroy the communicative resources inherent in lifeworld contexts such as the family, the mass media and deliberative political structures, it would be erroneous to reduce the last five hundred years of human history to the progress of functionalization. The possibility of rational deliberation among free and autonomous subjects, for Habermas, has not been extinguished by modern forms of cognition and action.

According to Habermas, even though Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory develop a critique of what for Adorno is a domineering enlightenment subjectivity, they too fail to exit the terrain of subject-centered thought, of the philosophy of consciousness.⁹⁶ In order to understand Habermas's point, I think it worthwhile to recapitulate my third chapter's account linking Dialectic of Enlightenment with Adorno's later works.

Adorno too, one could say, criticizes subject-centered reason, although for reasons different than those Habermas advances. Adorno's Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory retain the idea articulated in Dialectic of Enlightenment that reason, rather than being the principle of cosmic order or the logical activity of a disembodied subject that imposes order on the material world, cannot be abstracted from the human labor of self-preservation. Indeed, according to Dialectic of Enlightenment, it is in the course of the progressive mastery of nature, from Homeric times to

industrial society, that reason is formed as an instrument humans wield to preserve themselves in a threatening environment. For Adorno and Horkheimer, though, reason is not singularly a tool for human self-preservation. They suggest that the reflection they undertake in Dialectic of Enlightenment upon instrumental rationality's involvement in industrialism, technocratic management, scientism and the commodification of culture, is itself expressive of noninstrumental thought. Habermas, though, is correct in claiming that Dialectic of Enlightenment barely explains its concept of a reflective enlightenment that would sever the nexus Adorno and Horkheimer find between instrumental reason, on the one hand, and the domination of nature and social antagonisms, on the other hand.

In the previous chapter, I maintain that Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory sketch out a theory of an unregimented subjective experience, that is, of an experience that would not be governed by the conflictual interaction between a coercively constituted logocentric subjectivity and the material world. Adorno interprets the nonconceptual, but still subjective organization of material elements in what he characterizes as the most advanced works of art as an allegory of a subjective experience in harmony with nature. Negative Dialectics articulates the idea of a mode of writing that aims to dismantle the conceptual machinery of nominalistic thinking. Adorno conceives of linguistic constellations as a means of shortening the

distance between nominalistic concepts and their objects. Linguistic constellations are assemblages of sentences that seek to capture the historicity and fractured character of the social world. They respond, according to Adorno, to the lack of elasticity and nominalistic estrangement of concepts by striving for greater congruency with the processive nature of society. Adorno thinks it a desideratum of critical social theory that it adequately capture social reality. Yet he harbors no illusions about language's capacity to achieve a perfect fit with the external world. In the course of the development of enlightenment rationality, according to Adorno, thought has lost the capability present in myth mimetically to interact with nature.

Habermas suggests, as do other commentators (Bubner, for instance), that Adorno's key category of mimesis places his philosophy on the verge of the mystical and the irrational. I take Habermas to mean that the idea developed in Aesthetic Theory that autonomous works of art are repositories of truth (in that they organize their material elements in noninstrumental fashion and mimetically recover essential qualities of modern society lost to instrumental reason) is incapable of recursive grounding. Habermas's reasoning might be that by ascribing truth to autonomous works of art Adorno leaves the truth-conditions of his own language unexplained. I suppose that Habermas sees Adorno's

theory as ungroundable, as blocking the path to its reflexive justification by situating truth outside the terrain of discourse. In the following paragraph, I attempt to clarify Adorno's concept of mimesis. Later in the chapter, I argue that for Adorno this concept and the related notion of the preponderance of the object are accessible only by means of subjective reflection.⁹⁷ (Adorno's philosophy does not carry out a reactionary attack against Kant's Copernican revolution. It is true that Adorno implicates the idealist subject in the domination of nature. But he maintains that knowledge of nature can only be subjectively mediated. His philosophy does not propose to cancel the subject, only to release it from its logocentric confinement.) Such critics as Habermas and Bubner seem to me to miss the philosophical justification Adorno offers in the form of a logic of disintegration for his concept of mimesis. (I introduce the notion of a logic of disintegration in the third chapter, and I develop this notion toward the end of the present chapter.) I argue below that Habermas's concept of reflexive grounding is too diffuse for him to establish that the ungroundability of which he seems to accuse Adorno's concept of mimesis is objectionable.

In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno maintain that practitioners of archaic magic sought to pacify the demonic forces they perceived as threatening by behaving like demons. It isn't that Adorno and Horkheimer

advocate a return to the mythical past, as if such a past knew of a harmonious relation between humans and nature. They stress that myth too was governed by violence. Horkheimer and Adorno develop an enlightenment critique of myth that highlights the absence of critical reflection in, for instance, the sacrificial practices recorded in Homer's Odyssey. Because mythical symbols, unlike metaphysical abstraction, do not separate thought from being, they do not yet allow for the possibility of conceptually criticizing social arrangements, Adorno and Horkheimer maintain. But the Enlightenment's understanding of itself as if it were radically different from myth is in their view erroneous. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, the dominant form of enlightenment thought in the contemporary world (an abstractive, formalistic scientism that blindly reinforces the domination of nature) is, like myth, under the aegis of fate. Insofar as instrumental rationality cannot problematize its own desirability and direction, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, it operates outside the bounds of conscious control. On the theory advanced in Dialectic of Enlightenment, myth is false from an enlightenment perspective because it does not accommodate the self-critical agential enlightenment subject, whereas enlightenment is untrue from the standpoint of myth because it represses the human affinity with nature.

Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the history of language gives evidence of the loss in the course of the

process of enlightenment of the capacity mimetically to interact with the material world. According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, words no longer conflate image and sign, as did hieroglyphs. In positivism, perhaps the twentieth century's chief philosophical outlaw for Horkheimer and Adorno, language--they maintain--is straightjacketed within a formalistic framework that merely ratifies surface facts. Positivism, Adorno and Horkheimer contend, pictures science as if it were not implicated in the reproduction of society, and it is incapable of grasping the connection between a positivistically glorified science and the domination of nature.

As I argue in the previous chapter, Adorno's later works sketch out a theory of a nonrigidifying knowledge and experience of the material world. I should like to propose that his concept of mimesis lies at the boundary, so to speak, between conceptual language, which for Adorno is the means of expression of an autarchic subjectivity, and autonomous works of art, which he thinks organize their material elements in nonconceptual fashion. Such art works, he holds, point to a nondomineering subjective intercourse with the material world. (As an aside, I think it a mistake to interpret Adorno's notion of mimesis as aiming to provide direct conceptual access to nature. Adorno explicitly rejects the possibility of an unmediated knowledge of nature. In Negative Dialectics, he states that not even the most assiduous commitment to concretization can succeed in

affixing empirical reality to the page of a book.) It seems to me that Adorno's concept of mimesis links Negative Dialectics, which claims to disclose the lack of fit between conceptual fixity, on the one hand, and a historical and conflictual social world, on the other hand, with Aesthetic Theory, which reads autonomous art works as hinting at a way out of the enlightenment subject's logocentric confinement. Thus Adorno's category of mimesis underscores his view that conceptualization standardizes the natural world, thereby excising its differential qualities, and that the formally most advanced modern works of art--on reflection--bring repressed nature back into focus. It is precisely because his concept of mimesis aims to shift theoretical attention away from the effort at stabilizing conceptual assemblages that Adorno does not develop that concept. Adorno's notion of mimesis paves the way toward an aesthetic theory that interprets autonomous works of art as convicting abstract, universalistic concepts of their insufficiency with respect to the material world.

The previous point is emphatically made in Adorno's essay on Beckett's Endgame. Adorno argues there that Beckett's drama bears some resemblance with French existentialism. Yet, he contends, whereas the latter raises the notions of absurdity, choice and situation to the level of abstract, universal concepts, Endgame performatively captures the absurdity, irrationality and meaninglessness of language and culture in the aftermath of rationally executed

genocide and in the light of possible atomic annihilation. Adorno suggests that existentialism fails to grasp its own paradoxical nature: in seeking philosophically to grasp absurdity and meaninglessness, it invests them with meaning. Beckett's language, according to Adorno, codifies the dissolution of metaphysical and religious meaning. Hence, he maintains, the task of interpreting Endgame consists in grasping its resistance to conceptual subsumption. Beckett's drama mimes the terror prevalent in contemporary society the administrative discipline of which militates against individual autonomy, Adorno argues. The characters in Beckett's play make manifest the paucity of subjective spontaneity under a corporatist social order that continuously exacts obedience. Existentialist language, according to Adorno, fails to evade the Western predilection for abstraction, conceptual fixity, immutable essences. Beckett's drama, in contrast, does not compress socially produced pusillanimity into a philosophical thesis, Adorno maintains. Beckett's linguistic form, on Adorno's reading, exposes existentialism's thoroughly abstract character, and it unmask as illusory any philosophical pretense to educing meaning from an instrumentalized social order.

Habermas, to the best of my knowledge, does not offer an elaborate critique of Adorno's concept of mimesis. In the fourth chapter of the first volume of the Theory of Communicative Action, he summarily dismisses Adorno's notion

of mimesis as bearing the imprint of a philosophy that degenerates into gesticulation. Yet a more sober Habermasian objection to Adorno's concept of mimesis than the one Habermas himself raises is not all that difficult to construct. From the standpoint of Habermas's formal pragmatics of language, Adorno's aestheticized theory is but an aporetic linguistic attempt at exiting the realm of language. The attempt is said to be aporetic since Adorno eschews reflexively grounding his theory after the fashion of Habermas's pragmatics of language and seeks, rather, to overcome theoretical autarchy by orienting his philosophy toward the unregimented experience of nature he thinks autonomous art works presage. Habermas argues that Adorno intentionally engages in the paradoxical endeavor conceptually to convict concepts of their inadequacy with respect to their objects. Adorno, on Habermas's reading, thus destabilizes his own theoretical project.

The plausibility of Habermas's critique of Adorno's philosophy rests on the notion of the reflexivity of communicative action. As I claim above, Habermas reformulates Humboldt's idea that language not only points to the external world but is also self-referential: for Habermas, the possibility of a rational procedure for intersubjective communication rests on the still extant human capacity recursively to examine the validity of speech-acts, of lifeworld communication. Habermas recognizes the practical difficulties of actualizing the

ideal speech situation. As I point out in my second chapter, communicative rationality is in his view a counterfactual construct that serves to assess the liberality of present communicative structures and to provide a model for such structures to emulate. Thus Habermas sees his theory of communicative action as suggesting a nexus between theory and praxis: truth in theoretical, moral and aesthetic matters would no longer be locatable in a transcendent cosmic order beyond the planning and control of human beings or in the spontaneous cognitive activity of a monological subject; it would instead be consensually generated by free participants in actual discursive practices.

It seems to me, though, that Habermas fails to consider a consequence of the practical difficulties surrounding the ideal speech situation. If we do not yet know how billions of human beings divided by language, class, gender, power, nationalism, religion, and so forth, can engage in distortion-free communication, Habermas's idea of the discursive examination of the validity of speech-acts remains obscure. The notion that theory and communicative action are reflexive is wedded in Habermas's philosophy to a counterfactual idea that he thinks must be viewed as realizable if we are to live in humane fashion. Yet insofar as this idea awaits enlightenment about its practical implementation, it fails to protect Habermas's philosophy from the theoreticism it claims to circumvent. Habermas's

central category, that of a link between communicative action and communicative rationality, is most fragile. Theoretical stability of the kind Habermas claims is wanting in Adorno's philosophy could only be secured if Habermas were to succeed in demythologizing the question of the practical implementation of undistorted communication in a differentiated modernity. So far, however, his philosophy has merely gestured toward the ideal speech situation. Habermas fails to establish that the practical conditions for the realization of discursive interaction are any more accessible to current language than he claims is the case with Adorno's concept of mimesis. This should not be irrelevant to Habermas's theory, which after all purports to disclose the pragmatic grounds for continued progress in the direction of communicative enlightenment.

As I suggest in the previous chapter, Habermas is not alone in charging that Adorno's idea, subjunctively articulated in Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory, of an experience and knowledge of the material world whereby the cognizing subject would liberate itself from the strictures of identity-thought borders on theoretical chaos. Indeed, Ruediger Bubner contends that Adorno's insistence on the lack of congruency between concept and object prevents his philosophy from recursively clarifying its presuppositions. These criticisms seem to me best discussed in the context of Adorno's notion of the preponderance of

the object (Vorrang des Objekts), a notion that I will attempt to elucidate shortly. For the moment, though, I think it important to stress that such criticisms do not broach Adorno's suggestion that his philosophy is a logic of disintegration. In Philosophische Terminologie, he comes close to advocating Aristotle's definition of philosophy as a knowledge about knowledge. Adorno, however, and this is the sense of the expression 'logic of disintegration', argues that a reflexive knowledge must yield the conclusion that conceptualization misses the qualitative richness of its objects. If Descartes, Kant and the German idealists seek to stabilize the concept of subjectivity by assuming that the consciousness of objects presupposes self-consciousness, Adorno maintains that they err by extruding from the domain of subjectivity all somatic, objective, that is, natural elements. This means that subjectivity mustn't be conceived more philosophico as if it were independent from the dynamic of drives, and that the idealist subject projects the unity it imposes on itself onto the material world, Adorno holds.

The sentence 'Only those thoughts are true that fail to understand themselves', a sentence that figures in several of Adorno's writings,⁹⁸ underscores his view that the cognizing subject cannot be robbed of its cultural, historical, economic, political, social and instinctual attributes. Against the subjectivist turn initiated by Descartes, Adorno ceases to locate the foundation of

cognitive certainty in self-consciousness. The cognizing subject, for Adorno, cannot succeed in understanding nature and social reality by attempting in theoreticist fashion to secure the perimeter within which its activity is to take place. Adorno's reasoning is that the philosophical subject thus stabilized represses its own nature, which then remains concealed--all pretenses to enlightenment notwithstanding--and that it antinomially sets itself against a variegated material world that it distorts by means of conceptual standardization. Further, he thinks that the nominalistic distance between language and reality exposes discrete definitions and logical closure as artificial conceptual maneuvers.

Perhaps Adorno's idea that thought cannot incestuously ground knowledge explains Habermas's failure to elucidate the concrete circumstances in which communicative action would be recursively evaluated. Habermas correctly maintains that the concept of communicative rationality must be linked to communicative praxis if it is to escape idealism's grip; yet the failure of his theory to articulate how the communicative procedure it favors might be implemented in this sordid planet of ours means that the truth-conditions of the theory remain at present beyond its hermeneutical reach. Is it too irreverent to suggest that by situating the grounds for the verification of speech-acts, theories, and hence his own formal pragmatics of language, in a murky discursive beyond Habermas ends up

adding his voice to Adorno's claim that 'only those thoughts are true that fail to understand themselves'?

The difficulty, which may very well be insurmountable, in putting into practice the ideal speech situation suggests that the notion of distortion-free communication is at best vaguely accessible to contemporary consciousness. If Habermas's theory fails to move beyond paying lip service to the idea that communicative action is capable of reflexive grounding, his suggestion that Adorno's concept of mimesis defies recursive validation loses its critical edge. Adorno's concept of mimesis, on my reading, does indeed call into question the self-sufficiency of conceptual assemblages. Yet Habermas would have to elucidate the practical circumstances of discursive communication for his idea to hold that mimesis, in contrast to communicative action, stands outside the domain of the rational. Without a discussion of how on earth communicative rationality might be realized, the link between theory and praxis that Habermas claims to forge is missing.

If the previous criticism of Habermas's theory is tenable, if it is indeed the case that his dehistoricized concept of reflexive grounding presupposes a rather obscure discursive practice, his charge that Adorno's concept of mimesis amounts to gesticulation is not cogently supported. Habermas correctly implies that Adorno does not situate his concept of mimesis in a theory that seeks to ground its claims, to stabilize them within a clearly demarcated

communicative space. (For Adorno, any such theory is an artificial construct expressive of a subjectivity that projects its own forced unity onto the objective world.) Yet Habermas's ideal speech situation is so ethereal that it is questionable whether the related concept of discursive grounding has critical force. There may very well be other worlds, and a universal consensus is not logically impossible. But if the measure of the groundability of theories and concepts is given by a counterfactually construed communicative practice, then it is not at all clear how historically localized theories and concepts can be simply dismissed as gesticulation. Further, the reflexive argumentation Habermas imagines would be a universal intersubjective practice, and thus it is not obvious what warrants his assumption that his theory, unlike Adorno's philosophy, is not reflexive. I suspect that for Habermas the reflexivity of his theory rests on its thematization of the ideal speech situation, that is, on its recognition that it could be subjected to a discursive examination regarding its validity. The problem with this line of reasoning, though, is that it cannot be taken for granted that participants in an ideal speech procedure would find Habermas's theory intelligible. Habermas seems to assume he can smoothly project that a (counterfactually conceived) universal communicative praxis would retrojectively recognize itself as the actualization of his theory of communicative action. If I am not mistaken,

Habermas thinks that his theory is reflexive in virtue of a link, which I think is still missing, between the theory and a yet to be realized ideal speech praxis.

Habermas also argues that Adorno's theory, in spite of its critique of identity thought as expressive of a subjectivity that represses nature and conceals the social matrix of knowledge, remains caught up within the framework of the philosophy of consciousness. This means that, for Habermas, Adorno's philosophy fails to dismantle the Cartesian and idealist scaffolding that supports a monologically understood subject. Notwithstanding Adorno's notion of the preponderance of the object, according to which the materiality of the subject (that is, its affectivity and emplacement within society) is accessible to subjective reflection, Habermas contends that the philosophy of consciousness haunts Adorno's work. Habermas suggests that Adorno's espousal of a community of free individuals hints at distortion-free communication, and he points out that in isolated places (in the discussion of Eichendorff, for example) Adorno makes room for intersubjectivity. Yet, for Habermas, Adorno misses the fact that the subject is an effect of communicative structures, of the lifeworld.

As I argue in the third chapter, Adorno does not completely jettison the concept of the subject nourished by the philosophies of Descartes, Kant and the German idealists. In Negative Dialectics and in Zu Subject und

Object, Adorno retains the Kantian insight into the subjective mediation involved in the knowledge of objects. He argues that although objects exist in the absence of subjective mediation, we do not have cognitive access to what they are in themselves--what he terms 'naive realism' notwithstanding. But philosophies that rest on the notion of a transcendental subject, Adorno avers, mistakenly purport to erase the subject's constitutive objectivity. The abstract, idealist subject, Adorno maintains, is the conceptual reflection of abstract economic relations, of the prevalence of exchange-value.⁹⁹ Further, he holds that there is an element of ideology in the notion of a transcendental subject: the logical unification of consciousness, he suggests, masks the fragmentation of the empirical self prevalent within the social division of labor. And already in the chapter on Homer's Odyssey in Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the Western subject constitutes itself as the agent of human self-preservation by repressing instinctual satisfaction. Yet both Dialectic of Enlightenment and Adorno's later philosophy sketch out the idea of a reflective subject that would communicate with nature in a noninstrumental fashion. The subject's reflection upon the domination of nature, according to Adorno, initiates movement away from the conceptual homogenization of the material world. The remembrance of the sacrificing of happiness exacted by the progress in the instrumental control of nature and society,

he suggests, aims to dislodge the subject from the anthropocentric pedestal in which modern thought has put it. (Kant's Copernican revolution enthrones a subjectivity afflicted with a Ptolemaic complex.) Negative Dialectics follows a centrifugal course away from the hubris of self-centered humanism in the direction of an aesthetic theory that seeks to recover the subject's buried mimetic capacities.

Adorno interprets art as a subjective intervention upon the material world. This is not to say that Adorno locates the significance of art in authorial intention or that he thinks of works of art as private opinions about social reality. The point, rather, is that for Adorno art works do not straightforwardly mirror reality--be that as it may. Works of art, he contends, organize their material elements. Aesthetic subjectivity, according to Adorno, gives form to the colors, tones and words that figure in artistic creations. He thinks that the most advanced art works in modernity organize their material elements in nonstandardizing fashion. It is thus that he believes aesthetic subjectivity differs from the conceptualizing subject that he takes to be at the root of instrumental reason. For Adorno, it is precisely the nonconceptual, nonsignifying nature of modern works of art that explains their puzzling character, their resistance to theoretical understanding.¹⁰⁰ That at the level of form musical compositions and the visual arts eschew concepts goes

without saying. As for the works of literature that in Adorno's view display the most advanced formal features (the works, that is, of Joyce, Beckett and Kafka), Adorno's position is not that concepts do not figure in them at all. Rather, Adorno thinks that such works differ from conceptual systems in that they do not homogenize nature. Beckett's Endgame, for instance, does not proclaim more philosophico that modernity is marked by the dissolution of metaphysical and religious meaning, Adorno argues. He suggests that the very language of the drama and the trash bins that house Nagg and Nell (Hamm's parents) rescue meaninglessness from the grip of philosophical abstraction.

Adorno's idea that works of art are hermetic to conceptual understanding would be misinterpreted if taken as denying the possibility of aesthetic interpretation. Adorno's Aesthetic Theory is not guilty of sophomoric self-refutation. For Adorno, art works must be understood in their resistance to subsumption under theoretical formulas. His aesthetic theory respects the alterity of works of art, without thereby petrifying the distinction between theory and mimesis. According to Adorno, the nonconceptual nature of art reminds theory, as it were, of its insufficiency with respect to the material world. (The aura of untainted objectivity with which scientism invests modern natural science, Adorno maintains, is but the manifestation of a reified subjective consciousness. Critical theory holds that the mathematized language of the natural sciences is

incapable of thematizing the position of these sciences within the framework of the intellectual division of labor. This blindness suffices to give the lie to the scientistic glorification of the sciences of nature as models of true knowledge.) Aesthetic interpretation for its part, taps into the cognitive resources latent in art works, Adorno claims. Adorno thinks that by organizing their material elements in noninstrumental fashion, autonomous works of art subvert the logic of the subjective, instrumental domination of nature.

If Habermas's claim that Adorno's theory fails to exit the space of the philosophy of consciousness means to emphasize that Adorno does not take the turn toward the paradigm of communicative action, it is not in the least controversial. Adorno does not find mapped in what for Habermas are lifeworld communicative contexts the royal road to a more humane society. Of course, Habermas himself, at the end of the second volume of the Theory of Communicative Action, can only very generally (and implausibly, it seems to me) point to the modern family and mass media as the loci of communication undisturbed by systemic imperatives. But Adorno's notion of an unregimented subjective experience and cognition of the material world, which experience and cognition would be sensitive to the self's affinity with nature, does not presuppose a monological subject after the fashion of the philosophy of consciousness. To be sure,

Adorno retains the idea of an agential subject that would not experience the world passively. Still, his concept of mimesis subverts any claim to the logical autonomy of subjective consciousness. On Adorno's theory, if art works are resistant to subsumption under concepts, it is in part because aesthetic subjectivity does not logically unify the material elements to which it gives form. Further, according to Adorno, if autonomous works of art hint at an unregimented subjectivity, it is because they, unlike conceptual assemblages, do not erase the diversity inherent in nature. In Negative Dialectics, moreover, Adorno argues that the subject's conceptual activity is inescapably linguistic. He suggests, however, that in the course of the development of enlightenment thought language has become increasingly nominalistic, and that reflection upon the mimetic force of art can extricate the subject from conceptual systems fixed in their distance from nature. Adorno's discussion of the somatic, and social elements of the self differs significantly from the Cartesian and idealist construction of an autarchic subject.

Yet Adorno's account of the relation between subject and object does abstract from the Habermasian question whether extant communicative processes provide a glimpse of a rational, noncoercive society. His discussion of an unregimented subjective knowledge and experience of nature only vaguely thematizes the kind of intersubjective (for Habermas, communicative) context in which such knowledge and

experience might flourish. Dialectic of Enlightenment advances the view that the repressive, instrumental subject formed in the course of the human struggle for self-preservation and involved in the attempt at mastering nature is a condition of possibility for domination in society. For Adorno, a nonrigidifying, unregimented subjectivity is a necessary condition for a community of free individuals. Further, Adorno extracts from the philosophies of Kant and Hegel the notions of spontaneity and determinate negation, which notions figure in his allusion to a noninstrumental subject. Aesthetic knowledge and experience, according to Adorno, are subjectively mediated, though in his view the truth immanent in autonomous works of art is not produced as if in Fichtean fashion by subjective consciousness. Hence Habermas is right in pointing out that Adorno's thought does not leave the terrain of the philosophy of consciousness. I do think it important to stress, though, that in characterizing the philosophy of consciousness as positing both a monological subject of cognition that supposedly legislates truth and meaning and a monadic subject of action Habermas does not leave enough space to accommodate the differences between Adorno's philosophy, on the one hand, and subject-centered epistemologies and theories of history, on the other hand.

But Habermas's assertion that Adorno's thought does not exit the space of the philosophy of consciousness is meant not only to describe Adorno's philosophy but to criticize

it. At issue, I think, is the relation between subjectivity and communicative processes. Habermas argues that the modern subject is the result of processes of socialization and acculturation, that is, of communicative action, and that communicative action must be viewed as having both logical and anthropological primacy. The subject, according to him, is an effect of the lifeworld. Habermas thinks that modernity harbors a potential for communicative rationality, which communicative rationality he characterizes as a deliberative procedure involving autonomous subjects. Adorno, for his part, eschews the question of primacy. He takes the search for first principles to be expressive of an imperious subjectivity bent on foisting artificial logical hierarchies on reality. Further, in contradistinction to Habermas, he does not interpret modern communicative structures as telegraphing the ideal speech situation. The few remarks he makes about communicative interaction in contemporary society indicate that he views it as an expression of the prevalence of instrumentalization, exchange-value and the culture industry. He does not interpret modern communicative structures as sources of a possible noninstrumental subject. Habermas contends that Adorno's idea that the aesthetic subjectivity engaged in the construction of autonomous art works provides a glimpse of an unregimented subject is esoteric, and he suggests that the idea abstracts from the communicative conditions of possibility of true knowledge.

The plausibility of Habermas's critique rests in part on whether he successfully links the lifeworld with communicative rationality. In the second chapter and earlier in the present chapter I argue that he fails convincingly to forge such a link. I think Habermas's critique of Adorno further weakened by its unstable approach to the concept of subjectivity. If the subject is indeed an effect of communicative action, the sense in which she or he can be said to be capable of autonomous agency within the framework of ideal speech is obscure. Habermas's strict adherence to a proceduralist characterization of distortion-free communication rules out speculation within the framework of his theory about whether subjective autonomy might somehow be produced in the course of discursive interaction. As I point out at the beginning of this chapter, I do not see how Habermas can reconcile his attribution of logical primacy to communicative action with his notion that subjective autonomy is a necessary condition of distortion-free communication. If, as I suspect, Habermas smuggles the concept of subjective autonomy, which is rooted in the philosophy of consciousness, into the terrain of the theory of communicative action, his claim to having unmistakably overcome the "exhausted" paradigm of subject-centered reason does not hold. Hence Habermas's theory ends up failing to support his view that it is objectionable for Adorno not to have exited the space of the philosophy of consciousness.

To conclude: in falsely straightjacketing Dialectic of Enlightenment as if it reduced the process of enlightenment to instrumental reason, Habermas isolates it from Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory. Dialectic of Enlightenment's theory of the formation of subjectivity¹⁰¹ contains the kernel of the critique of anthropocentrism, of subject-centered humanism, unfolded in Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory. Dialectic of Enlightenment, that is to say, already advances the notion that subjective reflection upon the objective elements of the subject and upon the subject's (so far repressed) affinity with nature points to a knowledge and experience of the material world, which knowledge and experience would no longer be governed by a forcibly unified, logocentric, instrumental self. Habermas departmentalizes Adorno's philosophy: for him, Dialectic of Enlightenment incurs a performative contradiction, dedifferentiates human history more philosophico as if it were under the signature of a totalitarian instrumental reason and loses sight of the potential for rationality immanent in bourgeois culture and institutions; Negative Dialectics' conceptual reflection upon the lack of fit between concept and object incurs a self-referential paradox; and Aesthetic Theory's attribution of truth to autonomous works of art is esoteric, while the concept of mimesis amounts to gesticulation. It is not possible to glean from Habermas's atomizing reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment, Negative Dialectics and

Aesthetic Theory that Dialectic of Enlightenment's theory of the formation of an instrumental-rational subject launches the concept of an unregimented subjective experience of nature. It seems that for Habermas the only thing uniting the three texts mentioned above is their incapability of being grounded and of recognizing that true knowledge is consensual knowledge.

In contradistinction to Habermas's interpretation of Adorno's thought, my dissertation locates one bridge linking Dialectic of Enlightenment with Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory. For Dialectic of Enlightenment, although the process of the formation of subjectivity is tendentially a process of progressive instrumentalization, the subject has not wholly lost the conceptual resources for reflectively overcoming logocentric rigidification, for recovering its mimetic capacities. Negative Dialectics interprets such subjective reflection as the conceptual disclosure of the materiality of the subject, which materiality--according to Adorno--cannot be fully captured by concepts. Aesthetic Theory thematizes a dynamic tension between conceptualization and mimesis, and reads the subjective construction of autonomous art works as an allegory of an unregimented subjective knowledge and experience of nature. If the critique of Habermas advanced in the present chapter is correct, neither his concept of reflexive grounding nor his opposition to subject-centered thought succeed in supporting what I see as his core

criticism of Adorno's thought, namely that Adorno's notions of mimesis and of the preponderance of the object are objectionable because of their ungroundability and their indebtedness to the so-called philosophy of consciousness.

ENDNOTES

¹Max Horkheimer, "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie," Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 4, ed. Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1988) pp. 162-216.

²Juergen Habermas, Die Neue Unuebersichtlichkeit (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp: 1985) pp. 167-208.

³Juergen Habermas, "Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklaerung: Horkheimer und Adorno," Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) 130-157 and "Bemerkungen zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Horkheimerschen Werkes," Max Horkheimer Heute: Werk und Wirkung ed. Alfred Schmidt and Norbert Altwicker (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1986) pp. 163-179.

⁴Juergen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984) pp. 339-399.

⁵Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklaerung (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1971) pp. 20-22.

⁶See Herbert Schnaedelbach, "Transformation der Kritischen Theorie," Kommunikatives Handeln, ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) pp. 33-34.

⁷Juergen Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics," Communication and the Evolution of Society, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1979) pp. 1-68 and "Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der Kommunikativen Kompetenz," in Juergen Habermas and Niklas Luhman, Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971) pp. 101-41.

⁸Ruediger Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, trans. Eric Matthews (Cambridge: 1981) 173-82 and "Adornos Negative Dialektik," Adorno Konferenz: 1983, ed. Ludwig von Friedeburg and Juergen Habermas (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983) pp. 35-39.

⁹Michael Theunissen, "Negativitaet bei Adorno," Adorno Konferenz, pp. 41-65.

¹⁰Herbert Schnaedelbach, "Dialektik als Vernunftkritik. Zur Rekonstruktion des Rationalen bei Adorno," Adorno Konferenz, pp. 67-93.

¹¹Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 30.

¹²Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 39.

¹³Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 10.

- ¹⁴Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 25.
- ¹⁵Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 17.
- ¹⁶Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 11.
- ¹⁷Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 11.
- ¹⁸Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p.29.
- ¹⁹Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p.10.
- ²⁰Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p.16.
- ²¹Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 16.
- ²²Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 23.
- ²³Dialektik der Aufklaerung, pp. 23-24.
- ²⁴Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p.9.
- ²⁵Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 24.
- ²⁶Dialektik der Aufklaerung, pp. 39-40.
- ²⁷Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 40.
- ²⁸Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 148.
- ²⁹Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 19.
- ³⁰Gunzelin Schnid Noerr, "Die Stellung der 'Dialektik der Aufklaerung' in der Entwicklung der Kritischen Theorie," in Max Horkheimer, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 5, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1986) p. 433.
- ³¹Juergen Habermas, Die Neue Unuebersichtlichkeit, pp. 173-178.
- ³²See the title essay in Juergen Habermas, Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus (Frankfurt am Main: Suhtkamp, 1976) pp. 144-199.
- ³³Habermas, "Moralentwicklung und Ich-Identitaet," Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus, pp. 63-91.
- ³⁴Habermas, "Der Universalitaetsanspruch der Hermenutik," K.O. Apel et al., Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971) pp. 120-159.

³⁵Habermas, "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society," trans. Thomas McCarthy, Critical Theory and Society, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989) pp. 292-312.

³⁶Habermas, "Ein Anderer Ausweg aus der Subjektphilosophie: Kommunikative vs. subjektzentrierte Vernunft," Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne, pp. 344-379.

³⁷Habermas espouses theoretical coherence in "Wahrheitstheorien," Wirklichkeit und Reflexion. Festschrift fuer W. Schulz (Pfullingen: 1973) pp. 211-265.

³⁸Habermas, Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklaerung, p. 131.

³⁹Habermas, "Arbeit und Interaktion," Technik und Wissenschaft als >Ideologie<, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968) pp. 9-47.

⁴⁰Habermas, "Taking aim at the Heart of the Present," Foucault: A Critical Reader, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) pp. 103-108 and The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1, pp. 143-156.

⁴¹Habermas, Die Verschlingung von Mythos Und Aufklaerung, p. 130.

⁴²Habermas, Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklaerung, p. 130.

⁴³Habermas, Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklaerung, pp. 134-135. (Emphasis added).

⁴⁴Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklaerung, pp. IX-X.

⁴⁵Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 1.

⁴⁶Habermas, Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklaerung, p. 136.

⁴⁷Habermas, Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklaerung, p. 136. (Emphasis added.)

⁴⁸Quoted in Habermas, Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklaerung, pp. 154-155.

⁴⁹Habermas claims that the critique of instrumental reason articulates the "...global objection that the sciences are absorbed by instrumental reason...."(See Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklaerung, p. 136.) Habermas thus suggests that he views Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of enlightenment as placing science in the night where all cows are grey. A careful reading of the full paragraph in Dialektik der Aufklaerung where the passage on determinate negation appears makes it clear that Horkheimer and Adorno reject totalizing categories. (See Dialektik der Aufklaerung, pp. 24-25.) If their view of modern science contradicts their position on globalizing thinking, this would need to be shown in detail, which seems to be anathema to Habermas's approach to textual interpretation.

⁵⁰So much is implied in Habermas, Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklaerung, p. 157.

⁵¹Claus Offe, "The Separation of Form and Content in Liberal Democracy," Contradictions of the Welfare State, ed. John Keane (Cambridge: MIT, 1984) pp. 162-178.

⁵²Gilles Deleuze's discussion of Nietzsche's view that Kant's critique of reason is circumspect is quite instructive. See Deleuze's Nietzsche and Philosophy, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: The Athlone Press, 1983) pp. 73-110.

⁵³This point is frequently made. See, for instance, Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialektik (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982) pp. 184-187, and "Zu Subjekt und Objekt," Stichworte, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969) pp. 151-168.

⁵⁴Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p. 26.

⁵⁵Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 61-66.

⁵⁶Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 164-168.

⁵⁷Frederick Pollock, "State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations," Critical Theory and Society, ed. Bronner and Kellner, pp. 95-118.

⁵⁸Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 54-57.

⁵⁹Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 31-36.

⁶⁰Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 29-31 and 164-168.

⁶¹G.W.F. Hegel, Enzyklopaedie der philosophischen Wissenschaften, part I (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) pp. 135-147.

⁶²Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialektik der Aufklaerung, p24. An instructive discussion of Adorno's engagement with philosophical nominalism can be found in Guenther Mensching, "Zu den historischen Voraussetzungen der 'Dialektik der Aufklaerung'," Hamburger Adorno-Symposion (Lueneburg: zu Klampen, 1984) pp. 45-25.

⁶³Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp.166-168.

⁶⁴Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 45-48.

⁶⁵Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 48-50.

⁶⁶Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 39-42.

⁶⁷Adorno, "Die Revidierte Psychoanalyse," in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno Sociologica (Frankfurt am Main: Europaeische Verlagsanstalt, 1984) pp. 94-112.

⁶⁸See, for instance, Adorno, "Zum Verhaeltnis von Soziologie und Psychologie," Gesellschaftstheorie und Kulturkritik (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975) p. 134.

⁶⁹Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 39-42.

⁷⁰Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 69-136.

⁷¹Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 19-21.

⁷²Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 50-52.

⁷³Walter Benjamin, "Ueber das Programm der kommenden Philosophie," Zur Kritik der Gewalt und andere Aufsaeetze (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965) pp. 7-27.

⁷⁴Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 91-105.

⁷⁵Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970) pp. 513-519.

⁷⁶ Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, pp. 86-90 and 114-115.

⁷⁷Hans Robert Jauss, "Negativitaet und Aesthetische Erfahrung. Adornos Aesthetische Theorie in der Retrospektive," Materialen zur Aesthetischen Theorie Th. W. Adornos, Konstruktion der Moderne, ed. Burkhardt Lindner and W. Martin Luedke (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979) pp. 138-168.

⁷⁸Peter Buerger, "Das Altern der Moderne," Adorno-Konferenz: 1983, ed. Ludwig von Friedeburg and Juergen Habermas (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983) pp. 177-197.

⁷⁹Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, pp. 14-19.

- 80Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, pp. 513-517.
- 81Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, pp. 90-92.
- 82Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, pp. 173-176.
- 83Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, pp. 513-517 and "Towards an Understanding of Endgame," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame, ed. Bell Gale Chevigny (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1969) pp. 82-114.
- 84Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, pp. 86-90.
- 85Ruediger Bubner, "Kann Theorie Aesthetisch Werden? Zum Hauptmotiv der Philosophie Adornos," Materialen zur aesthetischen Theorie Th. W. Adornos, pp. 108-137.
- 86Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 148-149.
- 87Habermas's notion of the reflexivity of communicative action figures in his "Ein anderer Ausweg aus der Subjektphilosophie: Kommunikative vs. subjektzentrierte Vernunft," Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne, pp. 344-379.
- 88Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1, pp. 339-399.
- 89Axel Honneth, Kritik der Macht (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985) pp. 1-111.
- 90Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, pp. 86-90 and 173-176.
- 91Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 184-187.
- 92Habermas makes these points in the title essay of Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus, pp. 144-199.
- 93Habermas, Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne, p. 379.
- 94For discussions of Fichte's notion of a self-positing ego, see Dieter Henrich, "Fichtes >Ich<," Selbstverhaeltnisse (Stuttgart: Phillip Reklam, 1982) pp. 57-82 and Manfred Frank, Die Unhintergebarkeit von Individualitaet (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) pp. 1-49.
- 95This point is made in Habermas, "Erkenntnis und Interesse," Technik und Wissenschaft als >Ideologie<, pp. 146-168.

⁹⁶For a discussion of communicative ethics that distinguishes between the philosophy of consciousness and subject-centered thought, see Seyla Benhabib, Critique, Norm, and Utopia (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) p. 393.

⁹⁷Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 152-154.

⁹⁸Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 57-8.

⁹⁹Adorno, Negative Dialektik, pp. 149-151.

¹⁰⁰Adorno, Aesthetische Theorie, pp. 179-205.

¹⁰¹In my account of Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of the formation of the subject, I fail to note their sensitivity toward the difference in power between men and women. I thank Patricia Mills for helping me recollect that in their discussion of Homer's Odyssey Adorno and Horkheimer characterize the emerging instrumental-rational self as a patriarchal subject. Mills recommends the following materials: Patricia Mills, Woman, Nature, and Psyche (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) and Drucilla Cornell and Adam Thurschwell, "Feminism, Negativity, Intersubjectivity", Feminism as Critique, ed. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) pp. 143-162.

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